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THE TRIBAL ART OF MIDDLE INDIA

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THE TRIBAL ART OF MIDDLE INDIA

A Personal Record

by

VERRIER ELWIN

Geoffrey Cumberlege

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

N7301 .E4

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London, E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS CAPE TOWN

Geoffrey Cumberlege, Publisher to the University

First published 1951

Printed in Great Britain by Headley Brothers Ltd
109 Kingsway, London, W.C.2; and Ashford, Kent
and published by Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford
University Press, Bombay, India

To

D. V. SASSOON

257080

Preface

I HAVE CALLED this book a personal record, because nearly all of it is the result of my own original research in the field; the photographs, with a few exceptions, are mine, and the drawings have been made from specimens in my own collection or from photographs. Had I raided the museums for material, the book would have been fuller and more representative, but it would have been neither new nor mine.

The area which I have rather loosely called Middle India includes, for the purpose of this book, the Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh) and the States to the south and east which have now become part of them, the Koraput and Ganjam Districts of Orissa and the States which have been integrated in that Province, and in a sketchy, comparative sort of way, parts of Bihar.

I have lived among Gonds, Pardhans, Agarias and Baigas in the Central Provinces since the end of 1931 and have grown to know them fairly well. I have toured widely in the eastern and southern districts of the province, and have seen something of Rewa and Sarangarh. I spent three years in Bastar from 1940 to 1942, and worked there as Census Officer and Honorary Ethnographer. In 1943 I conducted an official inquiry into aboriginal conditions in three of what were then Orissa States—Bonai, Keonjhar and Pal Lahara—and made my first acquaintance with the Juangs and Bhuiyas. My first visit to Ganjam was later in the same year when I went with my friend Mr H. V. Blackburn into the Kuttia Kond country. Since then I have spent many months every year in the mountains of Orissa. I first visited Bihar, where I was the guest of Mr W. G. Archer, in 1940, and had brief glimpses then of the Hos and Mundas, Asurs and Uraons; later, in 1943, I visited the Santal Parganas and toured with the same delightful host, my guide in art as in poetry, in the Damin-i-koh, the classic Santal country. I toured in the Korku area as long ago as 1931. I visited the Dangs States of western India, in the company of Sir Francis Wylie, in 1943.

It is obvious that, in spite of having spent ten months of the year in the field for a period of fifteen years, I have only touched the fringe of this enormous area, and that the specimens I have been able to find were largely a matter of luck. There must be countless other examples of tribal art hidden away in remote villages, which it would take a lifetime to discover. I offer this collection, however, as a sample of what one individual has been able to collect. It is not much, it is true, but I am afraid that there is not much to find. We have begun too late; the great days of the Indian tribesman are gone; all we can do now is to search in the debris for traces of inspiration and scraps of beauty.

Of the photographic plates I owe Fig. 129 to Mr F. Berko, who was good

enough to photograph specimens which were discovered for me by Mr Shamrao Hivale, my companion and supporter throughout the preparation of this book. Figs. 20, 206 and 207 are reproduced, for comparative purposes, from E. Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Government Press, Madras, 1909) and *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (Government Press, Madras, 1907). Figs. 118-20 have been drawn from illustrations in S. C. Roy's *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur* (Ranchi, 1915) and *Oraon Religion and Customs* (Ranchi, 1928); Fig. 22 comes from E. T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872); Fig. 188 is from C. W. Anderson's article, 'The Rock Paintings of Singanpur', in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. IV (1918); Fig. 166 is from an article by J. Walton in *Man in India*, Vol. XXV (1945); Fig. 93 is from Shamrao Hivale's *The Pardhans of the Upper Narbada Valley* (Bombay, 1946). I am indebted to Col. D. H. Gordon for sending me the photographs of the Korku pillars reproduced as Figs. 99 and 100.

A number of illustrations from my own earlier books are reproduced here. Figs. 174 and 175 come from *The Baiga* (John Murray, 1939); Fig. 80 from *The Agaria* (Oxford University Press, 1942); Figs. 3, 69 and 92 from *Maria Murder and Suicide* (Oxford University Press, 1943), and Figs. 24, 32, 44-7, 51-2, 67-75, 94, 123, 125, 128, 144, 155 and 186 from *The Muria and their Ghotul* (Oxford University Press, 1947). Part of the section on 'Saora Pictographs' appeared in *Marg*, Vol. II (1948), and the section on 'The Decoration of the Body' in *Art in Industry*, No. IV (1947).

Mr Y. K. Shukla painted the Kond masks reproduced as Fig. 157. Many of the line-drawings are by Mr R. D. Motafram, who has illuminated several of my books by his labours; two (Figs. 80 and 92) are by Mrs Maeve Scott; two (Figs. 174 and 175) by Mrs M. Milward; others are by Mr Bakshi of the Zoological Survey of India and by Mr Chatterji and Mr De of the Department of Anthropology.

This book is inscribed to a friend whose interest in Indian life and art is enthusiastic and who, despite an unhappily late arrival in my history, has been a source of inspiration and happiness.

I could indeed have done little without the support of friends. Convention does not permit me to speak of those at Oxford House, Bombay, but I may speak of Mr Jehangir P. Patel, most loyal and generous of allies in a common cause, who made this publication possible. To him I tender my sincerest gratitude and thanks.

V.E.

Patangarh,
Mandla District, India

MS completed, 4 October 1946
Revised, 1949.

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Introduction

INDIAN TRIBAL ART outside Assam is rapidly disappearing, and in this book I have tried to rescue a few examples from the oblivion that within a few years will probably overwhelm it. Even here an unsympathetic critic may wonder whether the effort was worth while. For there is no doubt that the exhibits in this gallery are meagre and inferior compared to the superb work assembled in such books as Firth's *Art and Life in New Guinea* or *Arts of West Africa* edited by Sir Michael Sadler, to say nothing of the American Indian specimens presented by Boas and others. But it must be remembered that such books as these give us the choicest work of great peoples in their prime; they are to be compared, not to this work, but to that of Ajanta and Ellora. In the main, too, this African and Pacific art is that of comparatively uninhibited and vigorous populations, still hardly touched by foreign influence. Before the critic condemns the art of modern tribal India as debased and uninspired, he should remember the economic and cultural debris amidst which these scanty flowers have bloomed. There is little to inspire art in the tumbledown, odorous, bug-infested Kond or Saora hamlet; in the ignorance, poverty and depression of the Gonds or Baigas; economic exploitation and political oppression have lain too long like a heavy cloud over village India, smothering every aspiration towards the beautiful. Moreover the peculiar circumstances of Indian life deprive the aboriginals of much of their material; much has decayed, even more is concealed. There has been a system of education which encourages the aboriginal to despise the teachings and achievements of his own tribe, that infects him with the idea that there is something socially inferior about the craftsman, that—even when it does teach a craft like carpentry or drawing—weakens the ancient

sense of pattern, as Sir William Rothenstein has said, 'by putting before the young the dreary outlines of chairs, jugs and candlesticks'. In Indian society even today the man who works with his hands, like the singer and the artist, is relegated to the lowest caste. The Ghasia, admirable worker in brass, is an untouchable; so is the worker in iron; so is the weaver of useful and lovely cloth. The infection of this abominable attitude has spread to the aboriginals so that even when they do make something beautiful they try to hide it.

That is why it has taken fifteen years to collect even the few specimens illustrated here, though all through these years I have sought unweariedly for beautiful things. In the aboriginal world indeed I have found it in man himself more often than in man's productions; human flesh is the warm and lovely medium which nothing can altogether subdue and which springs adorable in the darkest hovel. But set that flesh to translate its own beauty into wood or clay and there is a lamentable decline.

But not only is the general poverty discouraging to artistic achievement; not only is the atmosphere one that stifles the aspirations of the craftsman; the actual rules of tribe and caste operate to restrict greatly the materials that may be used. Only the special classes—and there are few of them—may work in iron; pottery is taboo to all aboriginals and is now a monopoly of a Hindu caste; weaving is also, except with bark-yarn, generally avoided. Baskets and mats are made by many tribes, or by sections of them, but it has remained for the castes specially devoted to it to develop it into an art. Work in brass is strictly forbidden and the Ghasia is one of the most despised of the Hindu castes. This leaves little but mud and wood with which the tribal artist can work, for he has also largely forgotten the old art of fashioning grasses and leaves and flowers into ornaments of beauty. S. P. Rice wrote many years ago about the destruction of colour and romance among the Konds:

Introduction

'Once they loved gay colours. The Kond dresses, both male and female, are full of stripes and patterns, in blue, yellow and red. Where has gone the love of colour? . . . Once the women took a delight in decking themselves with flowers and a pride in the silver ornaments that jingled on their naked breasts. Where are now the grasses that adorned them, and the innocence that allowed them to go clothed only to the waist? Gone! withered by the blast of the breath of a "superior" civilization. Gone are the hair-pins of sambhar bone—an inestimable treasure in the eyes of the true hill Kond. Gone are the floral decorations and the fantastic head-dresses which are the pride of the mountain tribes. In dull, unromantic squalor our Kond lives, moves and has his being; and ever as he moves, is heard the clanking upon his wrists of the fetters of his debt.'

Rice was writing about the Konds of the Kondmahals; there are still among the Kuttia Konds of the mountains some who have retained their innocence and their love of beauty and are not ashamed; but in the main his picture is a true one and is descriptive of many tribes beside the Kond.

One curious result of this has been that in some cases the aboriginals employ members of the lower Hindu castes living in the neighbourhood to work for them. Such products are relevant to our picture of tribal art, partly because many of these Hindus are themselves barely distinguishable from the aboriginals, and partly because, since the work is carried out under the aboriginal's instructions and at his cost, it is a fairly accurate index of his taste. Thus we find the notable funerary pillars of the Bison-horn Marias being made, not by the Marias themselves, but by Hindu carpenters under their direction. Yet these carpenters never make such pillars under any other circumstances or for anyone else, and their product may thus be taken as to some extent an expression of Maria sensibility. Iron-work is always done by special guilds of blacksmiths, not all of whom are tribesmen,

but they, too, follow aboriginal taste and do not guide it. The Panos make beautiful cloth for their tribal neighbours—they have one style for Saoras, and a totally different one for Konds. Brassware differs in every tribe, yet it is always manufactured by the same Hindu caste. Why is it that the Ghasia makes a brass snood for a Maria woman and for no one else? a brass tobacco-case for a Muria and for no one else? a brass hair-pin for a Saora and for no one else? One is tempted to suspect that these modern ornaments made in brass by the *cire-perdue* process are substitutes for very old ornaments: for example, the original Saora hair-pin may have been of carved sambhar bone and on the same pattern as its modern substitute.

It has been noticed in other parts of the world how even neighbouring tribes may differ greatly in the field they choose for artistic expression. This is very obvious in Middle India. The Murias, for example, ornament combs and tobacco-cases and, like all tribes that preserve the dormitory and enjoy a vigorous pre-marital sexual life, they have a high standard of personal aesthetics. The Bison-horn Marias to the south use drab little combs from the bazaars, are poor at necklaces, but concentrate on their magnificent head-dresses, which are used by kindred tribes to the south and east, but never by the Murias—though the latter have had opportunities of seeing them. To find another tribe which, like the Muria, ornaments the comb we have to go a very long way east, to the Juangs, who have the same habit but an entirely different style. To find a parallel to the Muria ornamented tobacco-case, we have to ignore the Muria's neighbours, and all such tribes as the Gadaba, Saora, Bhattra, Bondo, and make our way to the Konds. Yet though the Murias occasionally use the node of a bamboo for tobacco, they never decorate it, as the Konds do, with rows of lozenges and horizontal hatching.

As far as I know, only the Uraons make village emblems with a totemistic basis; only the Santals carve litters for use in weddings;

only the Saoras design elaborate pictographs for the dead; only the Gonds, and then only the Gonds of one small area, make anthropomorphic pillars for a marriage-booth. The Bondos and Gadabas throw all their artistic energy into the decoration of their womenfolk; here they have produced living masterpieces, but this is all they have. There is no beauty in their villages which is not walking about.

Certain things, of course, are universal. The regard for cowries is one of them, though their use depends naturally on the local supply. Masks are found in widely separated areas, and their style appears to be wholly individual; it would be hard to pick out a Gond from a Muria mask, although the Bhuiya ceremonial masks and the Kond masks used as substitutes for human skulls are distinctive. Wall-drawings are distributed throughout the area, but the style differs enormously and does not follow any geographical line. The Saora pictographs have resemblances to those of the Gond and Pardhan, hundreds of miles to the north; both are precise, fussy, over-detailed. The Konds, on the other hand, go in for broad curves, vague indeterminate outlines and the repetition of a large number of simple geometric designs.

Everywhere there is a remarkable absence of sexual motifs, all the more remarkable because they are to be found in Hindu temples throughout the area. There is, or was, erotic sculpture at Barsur at the junction of Maria and Muria cultural areas; similar designs are to be found in temples in the heart of the Gond-Baiga territory in Kawardha and Bilaspur. Aboriginals everywhere delight in carvings of the breasts and vulva, and no human figure is carved without some exaggeration of the erogenous zones. But I know of only a few cases where human beings are shown in the act of sex; though there is one Maria example of dogs copulating and two Saora representations of birds being covered.

Another curious feature of tribal art is the apparent reluctance to decorate things of everyday use. It is rare, for example, to find a carved grain-husker (though I have found one); the legs of cots, which are celebrated in song, are not decorated, though they offer excellent opportunities. Water-pots are seldom adorned, ploughs—so far as I know—never. It is specially odd that so little art exists in connexion with alcohol. There are no drinking-mugs (as among the Nagas); the aboriginal takes his liquor in a leaky leaf-cup which he throws away. Even the Saoras, who do regard alcohol as a serious element in the art of living, have apparently never thought of decorating their drinking apparatus—a long pipe fitted to a gourd which is dipped into a common pot.

No book could be of greater service to the student of modern tribal art than Richard Starr's *Indus Valley Painted Pottery*, for here he will find clearly illustrated and illuminatingly discussed many of the motifs which the tribesman uses today. On wall and door, on comb and tobacco-case the modern tribesman carves geometric and symbolic designs that are thousands of years old, going right back to the ancient civilization of the Indus Valley. I suggest as an interesting exercise that the reader should put before him the books by Firth, Sadler and Boas already mentioned, together with this work and Starr's. Let him turn them over and examine the decorative—not the representative—motifs most prominent in each. He will find a very striking similarity between the tribal work here and in Starr, and an equally striking divergence from the scrolls, spirals and reversed loops of New Guinea, the grotesque symbolism of American India, and the astounding distortions and exaggerations of Africa. I would particularly draw attention to the persistence all the way down from Harappa and Amri of the loop with pendants dropping from the belly, and of the survival from Samarra of a pattern of contiguous upright and inverted triangles with diagonal hatching sloping alternately right and left.

The first of these motifs appears today on a Juang comb; the second is common throughout the book.

To some extent the surviving art of these tribes is bound up with their institutions. For this reason I have treated my specimens in this book as functionally as possible, putting them in their setting by description and illustration. The Saora cult of the dead results in the Saora *ittal*; the Kond dread of Bhimul finds expression in decorated walls, doors and bins, as well as in tattooing. Wherever the dormitory has survived, it acts as a stimulus to artistic effort. Some of the Juang dormitories are adorned with remarkable wood-carvings; the Muria dormitories are polytechnic in their inspiration. So long as the dance survives, we shall probably not lose altogether the head-dress or the mask, though the introduction of paper into village India is likely to have consequences not anticipated by the Education Department. Anything that makes ceremonial more expensive and more elaborate should be encouraged, for otherwise there is no arena in which the artist can display his powers.

These are hard days for the simple, pre-literate peoples of the world. In India, it is essential that the tribesmen should grow up to take their place in the life of a free, rapidly advancing country. But there is a risk, as the tragic example of Africa and the Pacific shows, that this speedy and enthusiastic change, prompted by external agencies, may have a destructive effect on the people's art. Tribal India is to be filled with thousands of small schools, and there is great danger that while the bright eyes of boys and girls will be trained to decipher the script of languages other than their own, they may not be taught to recognize and love beauty. Their minds may be constricted to believe that all that is natural, open and simple is somehow bad. Their hands may be trained to produce inferior yarn with which to conceal the loveliness of their bodies, but not to make beautiful things with which to decorate hair and throat and arms. There is danger

that they will be led to reject the old life and that they will be given in its place little idea of how to love rhythm and vitality, exuberance and delight.

This is a hard saying, but unless a new human and scientific spirit directs the educational policy, this is what may happen—and everyone who has first-hand knowledge of the village school in tribal India will recognize the danger.

I do not know how this book will appeal to artists. I offer it to them with real humility. They will not find here discussions on the philosophy or criticism of art, which I am ill-qualified to give. I hope that they will be content to accept the book for what it is, as part of the record, as an infinitesimal moment in the history of man. This is how a certain type of human being at a certain stage of development behaved, put himself forward and showed his mind and heart.

II

The Decoration of the Body

O forest-bird! O forest-bird!
You want anklets for your feet O!
You want a necklace for your throat O!
But where will you get their price
Here in the beautiful forest?
O forest-bird!

THE ABORIGINALS, deprived by custom or taboo of many media of expression, find some satisfaction of their artistic impulses in the decoration of their own bodies. This ornamentation, which is one of the earliest forms of art and probably preceded the wearing of clothes, is a very large subject and I can only touch the fringe of it here, giving a few notes and examples from my own record.

The custom of adorning the actual skin survives in the tattoo, which is widely practised in aboriginal India: it is a rather separate topic and I do not attempt it here. Mutilations intended to make a person beautiful or attractive have, except for the mutilation of the ear, mostly disappeared from peninsular India. Painting of the body continues on ceremonial occasions.

FIG. 1. *Dongria Kond hair-pin of brass, decorated with bits of mica and bunches of the feathers of the Scarlet Minivet, from Ambdhoni, on the slopes of the Nimgiri Mountain in Orissa. Length, $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches.*

Fig. 8 shows Kuttia Kond dancers decorated with white and red stripes. Once in Bastar I saw a Muria dancer being painted with white stripes to represent a tiger. At festivals Saora girls make little stars on their faces with the splayed ends of a twig; Murias decorate themselves with rows of dots. The styles of pictographic mask-decoration, which I illustrate later on, may not be altogether imaginary, but may preserve traditions of old facial adornment.

The use of flowers, leaves and feathers was common in classical times; the Ashvins, for example, are described as *pushkara-sarj*, or wreathed with the lotus. Still today some aboriginals show remarkable taste in decorating themselves with these simple things, and it is not altogether an advance that the fresh fragrant marigold or hibiscus in the hair or behind the ear should have yielded to heavy ornaments of brass or silver.

The use of actual ornaments is generally attributed to Hindu influence. A Saora legend describes how, originally, women never even thought of wearing ornaments. But one day a rich Hindu went on a journey and brought home gold and silver ear-rings and bangles for his daughter. A Saora girl saw them and wept for them and would not be comforted. When no one could do anything with her, they sent her to the Supreme Being and even

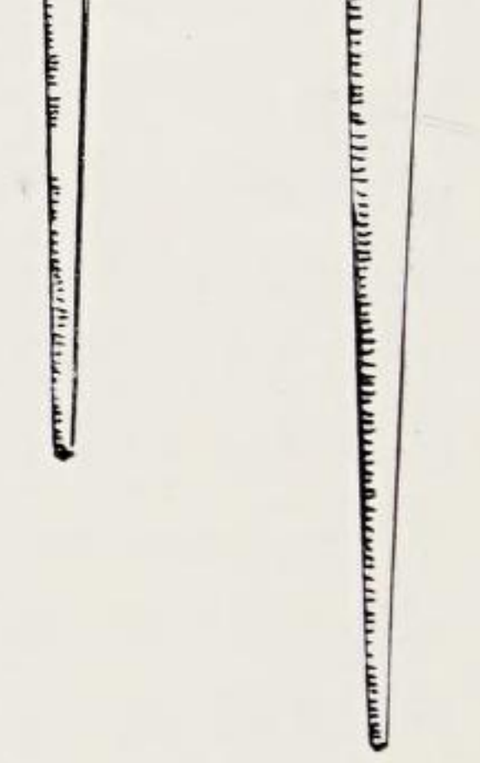


FIG. 2. *Muria girls' hair-pins of carved wood. Actual size.*

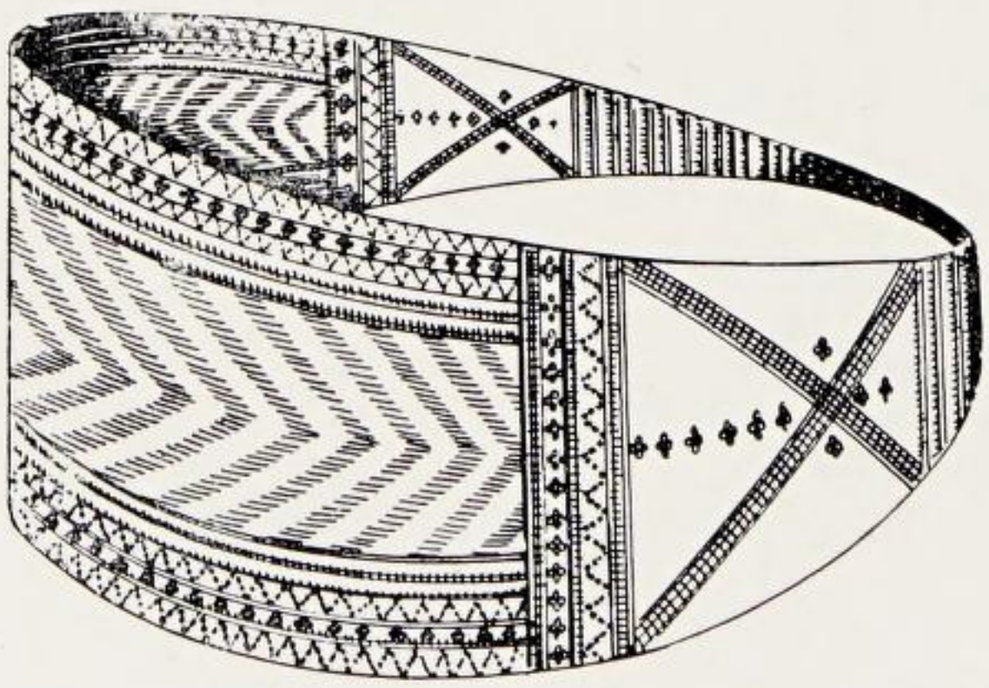


FIG. 3. *Elaborate brass fillet worn by Bison-horn Maria women in Bastar.*

for him she refused to cease weeping until she got what she wanted. At last he killed a goat; with the entrails he made the girl a long necklace and draped it round and round her neck; he chopped up bits of flesh and made them into red beads; he roasted the liver and made black beads of it. After that, the tradition goes, the people learnt to make beads of earth, and so the habit of artificial adornment came into being.

Her hair is usually an aboriginal woman's masterpiece. It is remarkable what a lot she can do with it, even without the use of mirrors. Even the dressing of the hair is sometimes a work of art; the Kuttia Konds make a great bun to the side of the head, the Gadabas tie their hair in a door-knocker pattern (Fig. 9), some Saoras bob their hair in a most attractive fashion.

Hair-pins are not very common. The Konds formerly made them of sambhar bone; they still sometimes make hair-pins of porcupine quills; in Fig. 1 I show an attractive modern substitute from the Nimgiri area. The Murias carve wooden hair-pins (Fig. 2), and sometimes attach bead-pendants and cowries to them. The Saoras seem to have lost their original pins and now use a long brass pin made by the Ghasias (Figs. 4 and 10); they are the only people to wear it and it evidently represents some former decoration now forgotten.

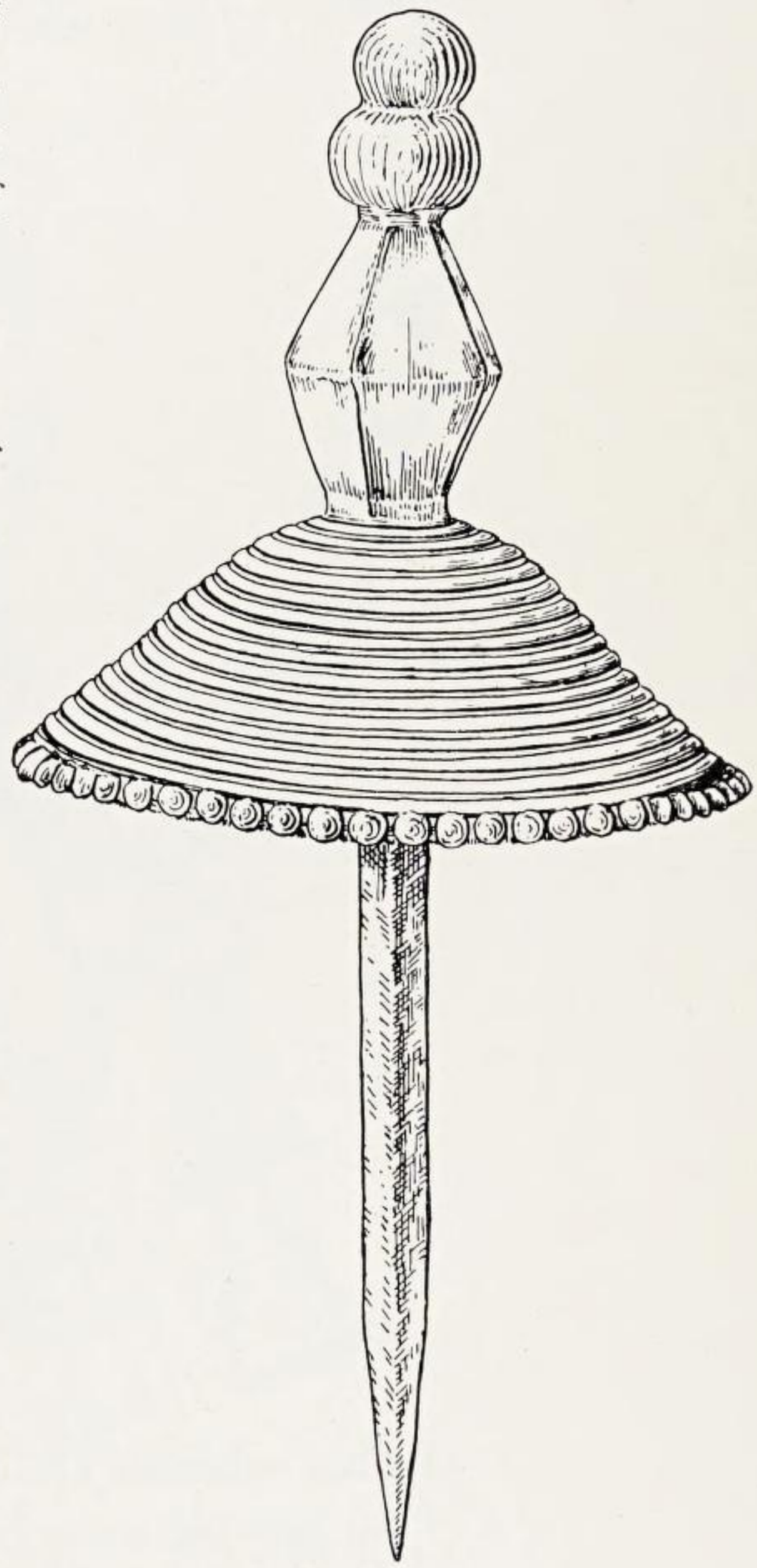


FIG. 4. *Saora hair-pin made of brass. Length,* $6\frac{1}{8}$ *inches.*

Head-bands are common in certain areas. The Gadabas wear an attractive fillet of red beads; the Saoras tie their hair with bands of

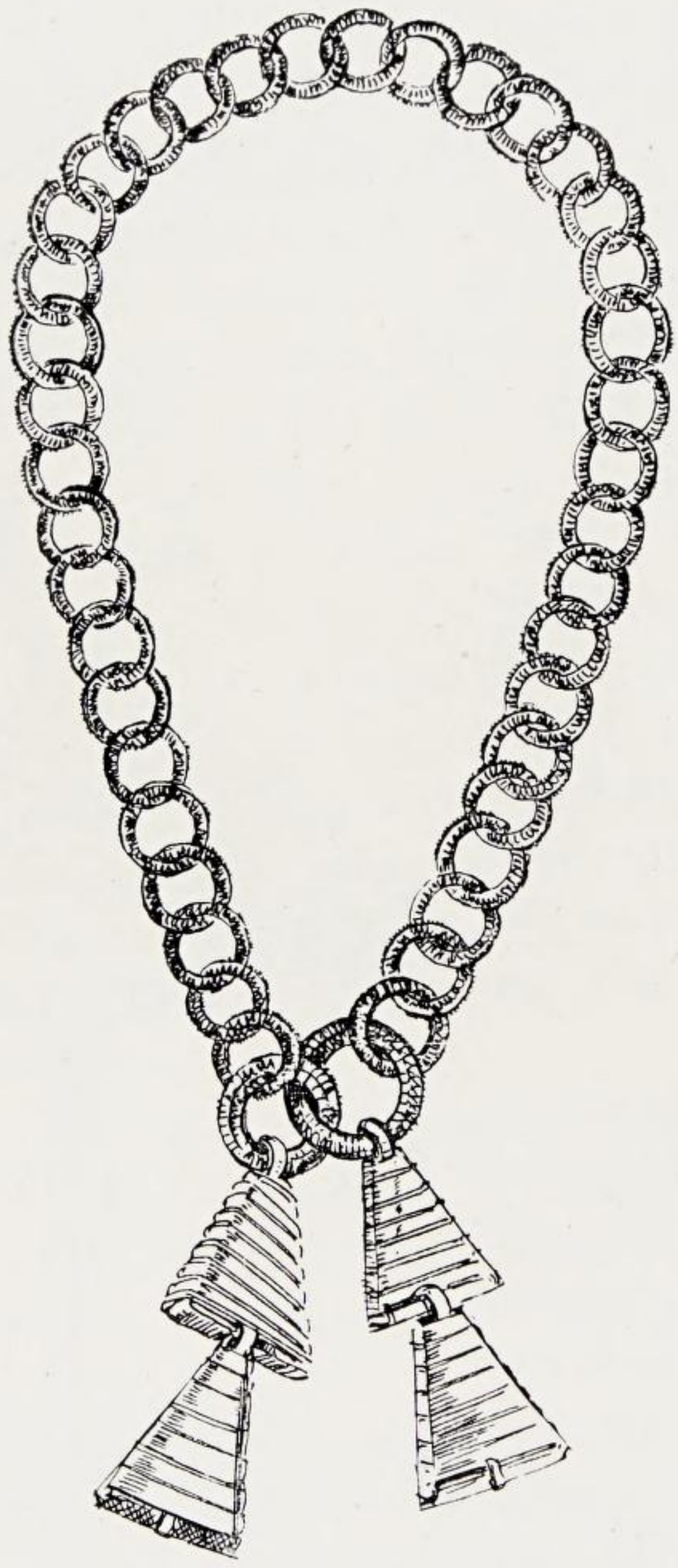


FIG. 5. *Baiga hair-ornament of plaited reeds, which is attached in bundles to the back of a girl's head. Mandla District, C.P.*

caryota fibre; even the Bondos, who shave off their hair, decorate their heads with many fibre-bands which they adorn with flowers. The Murias, both boys and girls, wear fairly elaborate bands of coloured beads—the beads are from the bazaar, but the patterns are their own (Fig. 11); the Hill Marias, and some Murias also, prefer carefully woven bands of various grasses and fibres. Bison-horn Maria women wear either a simple brass band (Fig. 12) or a more elaborate snood (Fig. 3). In the Central Provinces the beautiful silver *dhar* and *bindia* is worn over the head (Figs. 14 and 15); this, too, may be a substitute for an earlier home-made ornament. Baiga girls attach streamers of coloured cotton, cowries and plaited reeds to their hair, which is sometimes allowed to hang unplaited down their backs (Fig. 5).

The aboriginal ear has now almost entirely capitulated to the bazaar. Very few original ornaments are used. Kuttia Konds use large numbers of little rings through the fold of the helix; Maria women have the same habit. Gadaba women wear enormous rings of very thin brass; the Didayis use similar but smaller rings. Some tribes—only the

Saoras in our area—distend the lobe of the ear enormously (Fig. 10) and then put a ridiculous metal spring from the bazaar round the hanging skin, but this has probably a magical rather than an artistic purpose. The custom is also known in southern India, and is certainly very old.

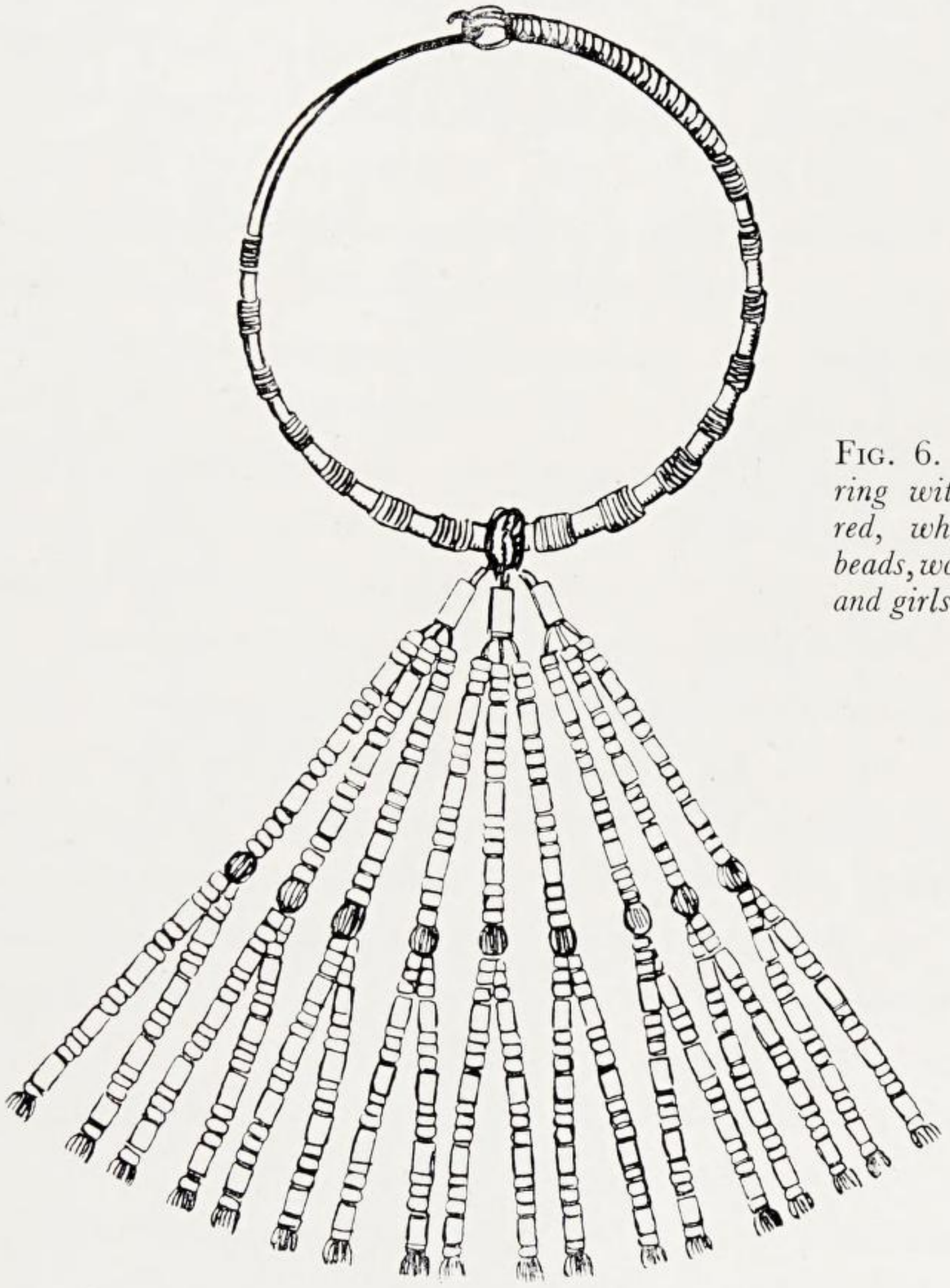


FIG. 6. *Muria earring with pendant of red, white and blue beads, worn by both boys and girls. Actual size.*

Necklaces were formerly made by the aboriginals themselves from natural things like shells, beans, stones and wooden cubes. Today, however, beads are more commonly bought from the bazaar and the arranging of these in patterns, and the matching of necklaces with

each other, gives some opportunity for artistic display. The Gond tribes and the Konds (Fig. 13) do this best. The Murias are adept (Fig. 11) and so are many Gonds, Pardhans and Baigas in the Central Provinces. The Hill Marias make a beautiful necklace of white beads with bells and are imitated in this by some Murias (Fig. 17).

Sometimes the mass of necklaces is so great that it serves as a sort of blouse, completely concealing the breasts. Francis wrote of Saora women in the old days that they wore 'masses of brass wire and bead necklaces a foot deep which almost prevent them from turning their heads and into which they stick their cheeroots'. Bondo women today are weighed down with an enormous quantity of brass and iron ware. Maria women, too, tend to put on far too much. The general effect, however, is artistically distinguished. The Bondo woman (Fig. 16) is an exact expression of the aesthetic ideals of her tribe; the Bondo man considers her superior in beauty to all others. So is the Gadaba woman, who even to Western eyes has an appearance as attractive as it is unusual.

Bangles, armlets and rings are also used by some tribes in great profusion. Just as the primitive painter fills his picture far too full of detail or the carver carries to an absurdity his *horror vacui*, so the Kuttia Kond girl overcrowds her shapely arms with heavy and unsightly bracelets, and the Bondo woman becomes stiff and awkward with the exuberance of her decorations. Muria girls sometimes have every finger of both hands covered with rings.

Anklets are less common, and I know of no example of a genuine aboriginal decoration for the feet or legs.

Iron ornaments are generally worn for some magical purpose. Iron rings are a protection against lightning by those believed to be subject to this danger; iron neck-bands are used at weddings to keep off hostile witchcraft; an iron hair-retainer may be worn as a cure for headache. It is a pity that the aboriginal blacksmiths have not developed more skill in making ornaments of iron, for they would be quite capable of doing so.

The Decoration of the Body

This sketch of personal decoration, brief as it is, is necessary as an introduction to the whole subject of aboriginal art; indeed, there is more evidence here of genuine aesthetic delight than in much of what is regarded as technically 'artistic'—aboriginal painting and carving is all too often motived by religious apprehension or personal self-importance rather than by a desire to create something beautiful. But the creation of a perfect head of hair in boy or girl, the lay-out of a scheme of neckware, the arrangement of flowers and feathers for a dance is a real expression of tribal sensibility and gives as much satisfaction as any other form of 'soul-soothing art'.

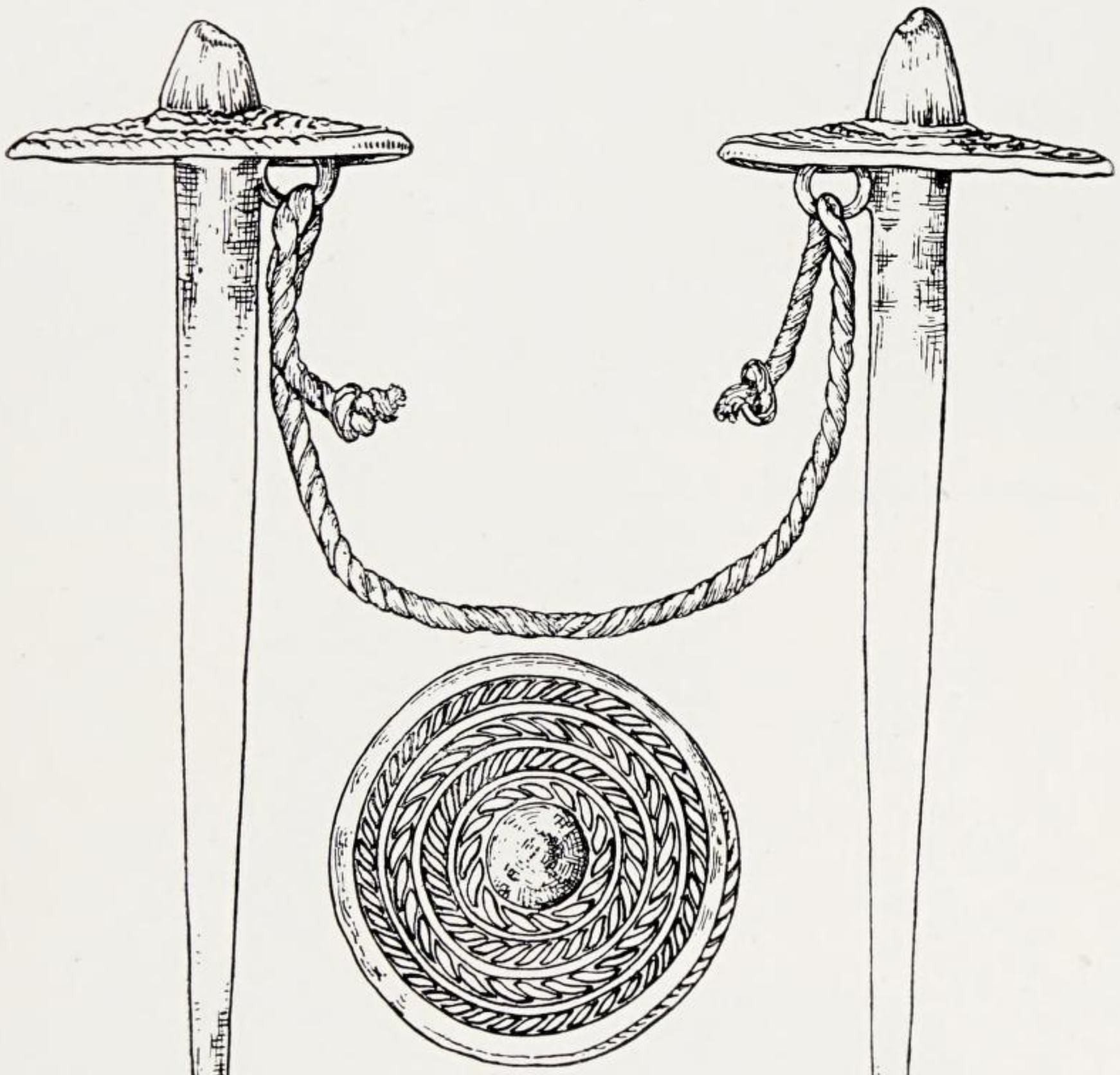


FIG. 7. *Kuttia Kond brass hair-pins. Actual size.*

FIG. 8. *Kuttia Kond dancers, their bodies decorated with red and white stripes, at Duppi, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

FIG. 9. *Gadaba woman with hair tied in door-knocker fashion. Thal Duralu, Koraput District, Orissa.*

FIG. 10. *Saora woman wearing brass hair-pin and showing the enormously distended lobes of the ear, common in this tribe. Boramsingi, Koraput District, Orissa.*

FIG. 11. *Muria boy, the Likhen of the Timnar dormitory (Bastar), with characteristic bead head-bands and other decorations.*

FIG. 12. *Bison-horn Maria girl of Mokhpal, Bastar, wearing brass fillet and bead necklaces.*

FIG. 13. *Kuttia Kond youth of Sapir, Ganjam District, Orissa, wearing carefully-made bead necklaces.*

FIG. 14. *Phula, a Pardhan girl of Mandla District, wearing silver* dhar *and* bindia.

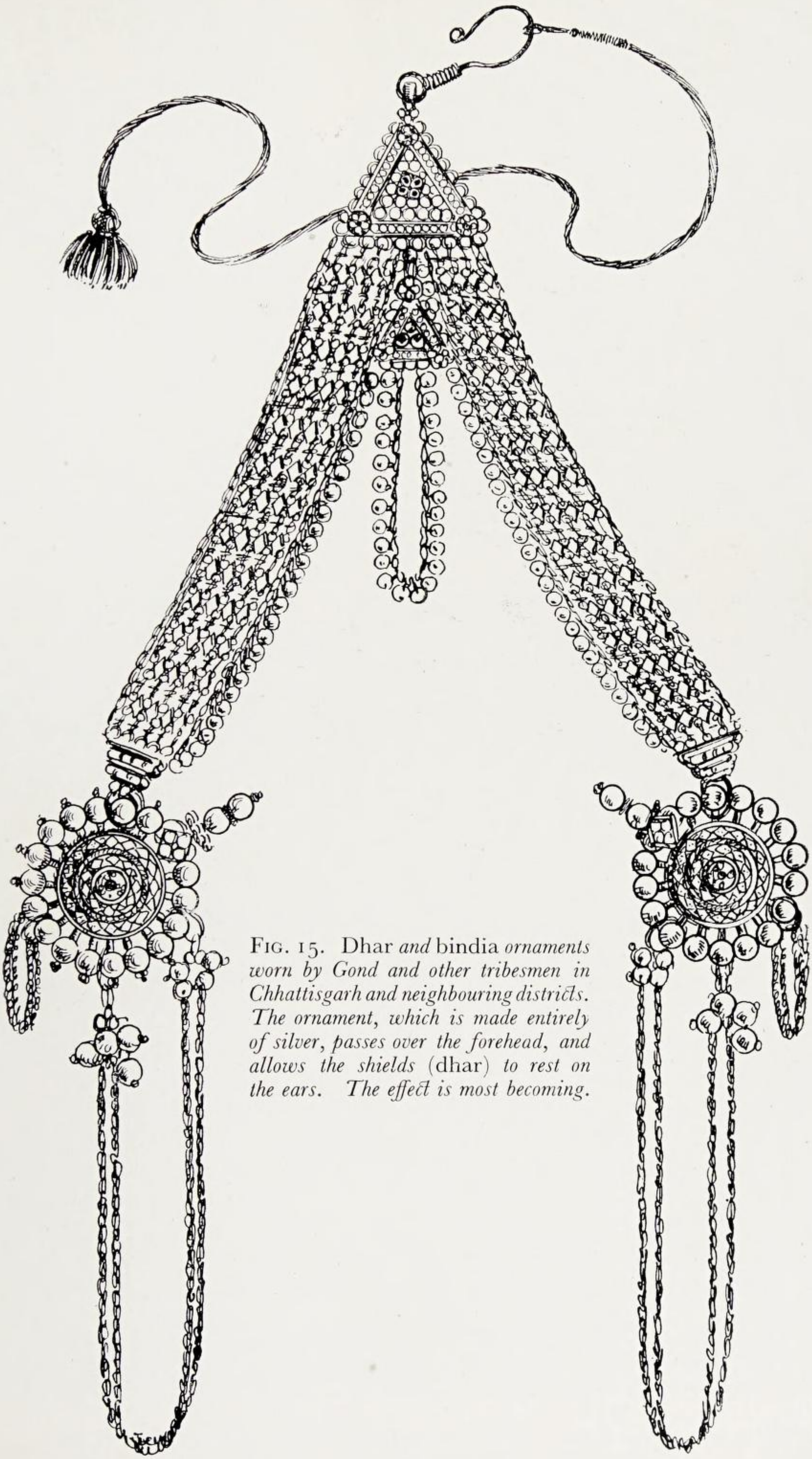


FIG. 15. Dhar *and* bindia *ornaments worn by Gond and other tribesmen in Chhattisgarh and neighbouring districts. The ornament, which is made entirely of silver, passes over the forehead, and allows the shields* (dhar) *to rest on the ears. The effect is most becoming.*

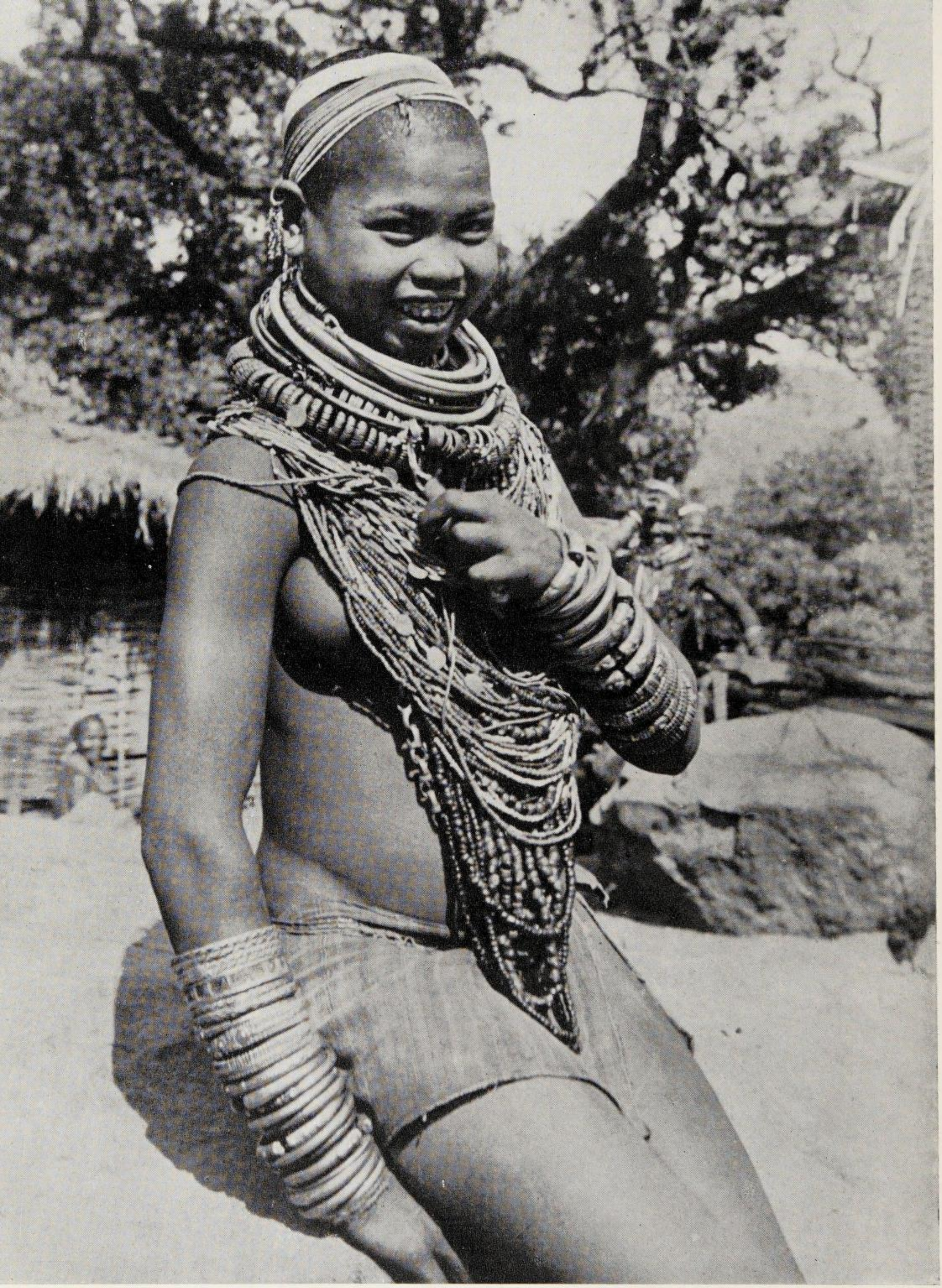


FIG. 16. *Bondo girl, Killub Sisa of Bodapada, Koraput District, Orissa, showing the mass of ornaments worn by women of this tribe.*

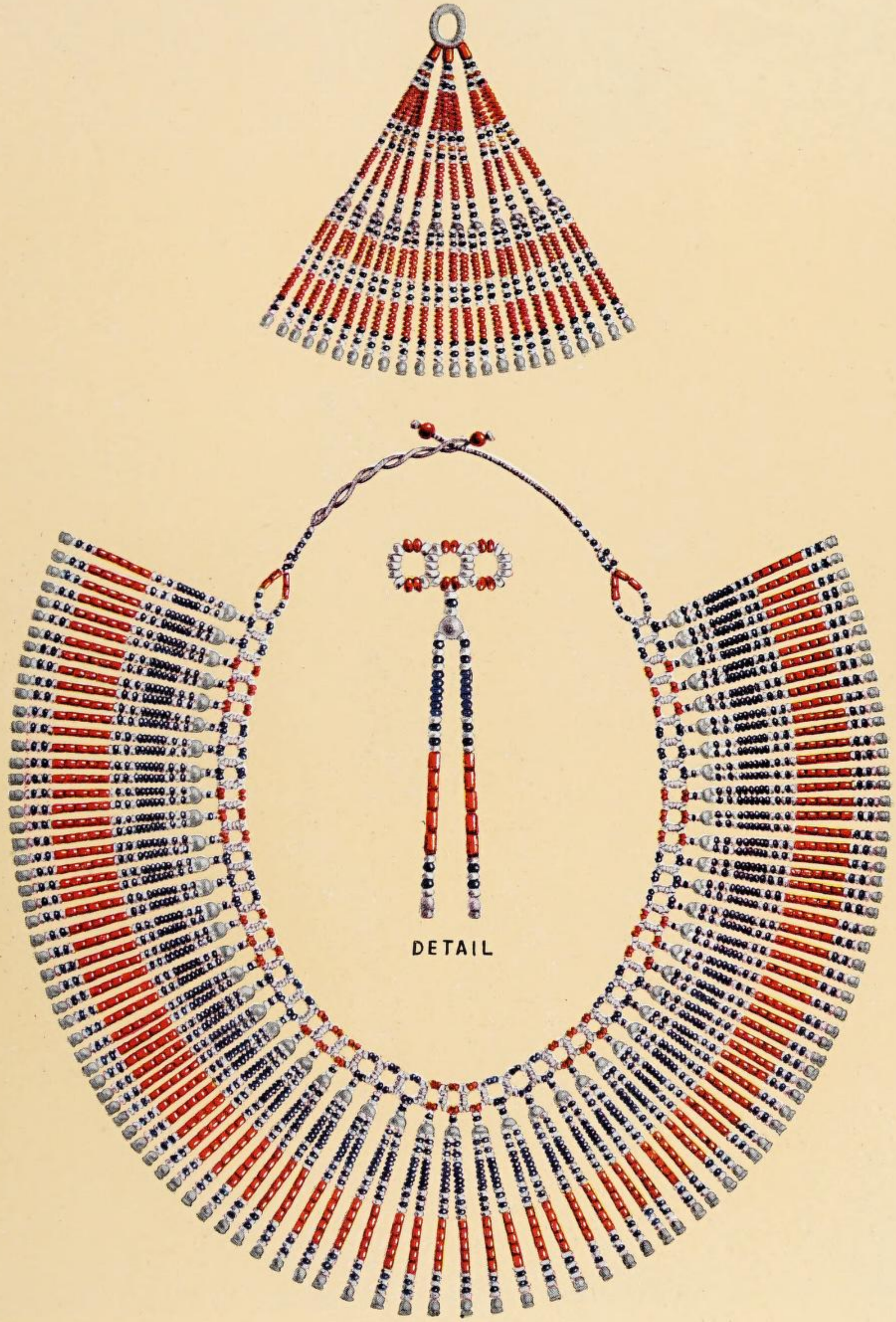


FIG. 17. *Muria necklace and ear ornament from Nayanar.*

FIG. 18. *Pangia Kond girl showing great simplicity of adornment. Note the three rings in the nose characteristic of parts of Orissa.*

FIG. 19. *Saora girl of Liabo, Ganjam District, Orissa. Note the line down the middle of the forehead and fine brass armlets.*

III

The Art of Tribal Dress

FROM THE ORNAMENTATION of the body we pass by a natural transition to its covering, but this, too, is a wide and complex subject and can only be suggested here. The great majority of aboriginals in India now dress in mill-cloth and what they wear is of little interest to the artist or ethnographer—except perhaps as part of the melancholy study of the decline of primitive taste before the demands of big business. A number of tribes, especially in Orissa, use cloth woven for them by Hindu weavers from yarn spun by themselves or purchased in the bazaars. Some of this Pano, Dom and Ganda cloth is of high quality; the cloth made in Kalahandi for the Konds, in Ganjam for the Hill Saoras, in Sarangarh and Sambalpur is beautiful in both colour and design. It cannot, however, be illustrated here; there is too much of it. All I can do is to take the reader up to the point where the aboriginals cease to make their own garments.

The aboriginals can never have appeared more beautiful than when they went altogether naked—a state of affairs to which perhaps the world will one day return. Their perfectly formed bodies, sometimes a rich golden brown in colour, are still a delight to see; even today the more primitive tribes have no sense of embarrassment about themselves: men and women bathe naked freely and the women—who are among the most virtuous in the world—dress in the ancient Indian fashion which may be seen in the paintings of Ajanta and the carvings of a thousand temples. It is refreshing to find such innocence in the modern world, though I fear it has not a long life ahead of it. There are few 'civilized' persons with intelligence enough to appreciate the truth of the Abbé Dubois' observation that, 'Of all the women of India, it is especially the courtesans who are the most decently clothed,

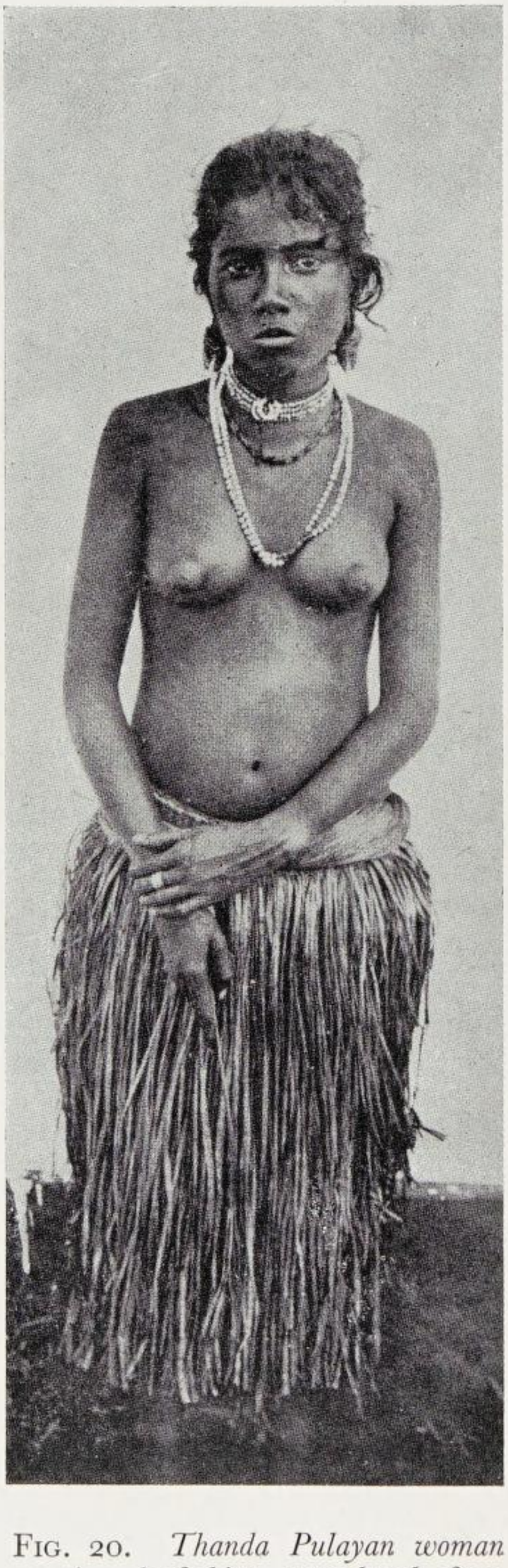


FIG. 20. *Thanda Pulayan woman wearing leaf-skirt, reproduced from E. Thurston's* Castes and Tribes of Southern India (*Madras*, 1909).

as experience has no doubt taught them that for a woman to display her charms damps sensual ardour instead of exciting it, and that the imagination is more easily captivated than the eye'.

Perhaps the earliest and most primitive form of attire, a natural development of some kind of adornment, was the girdle, and examples of this may still be found. The Juangs used to make a beautiful girdle of baked earthen bugles, strung on multiple cords about the waist (Fig. 22). The Kuttia Konds still wear a multiple cord girdle of bark-fibre (Fig. 21) and pay far more attention to it than they do to their scanty clothes. Saora women sometimes wear many strings of dark blue beads which hang down somewhat over the buttocks. Hill Maria women wear the sacred *mudang*, a waist-cord on which large numbers of bamboo (now often brass) rings are strung; it is never removed and is disposed of after death with the corpse. Hill Maria men and Murias make finely arranged girdles of cowrie shells, and on ceremonial occasions tie their waists with sashes.

The first proper dress in aboriginal India was made of leaves, and this natural and simple attire has survived in

some places to the present day. A number of tribes in southern India are reported as wearing leaves till recently. The Koragas wore leaves woven together into a sort of apron; the Irulas stitched leaves together; the Thanda Pulayan women made a skirt of leaves cut into lengths and tied so that the unwoven strings hung in a bushy tail behind and in front (Fig. 20). The wilder Vettuvans of Malabar wore clusters of long leaves suspended from the waist. I give here a beautiful picture reproduced from Dalton of two Juang girls whose leaf-attire is held in place by the girdle of earthen bugles (Fig. 22); years ago the Kuttia Konds were wearing leaves as their ordinary attire and today put them on without embarrassment. Women wear plantain leaves (Fig. 24) and men tie a flexible leaf, just as if it was a bit of cloth, between the legs.

The next stage is the manufacture of bark-cloth. There are many references to this in the ancient Hindu literature. Men were instructed to cut the branches, women to peel the bark and, after removing the cortex, to soak it until it softened. The juice of a ripe coconut with turmeric and a fragrant mountain vine was used to scent this cloth, which is, I believe, still used by the Alekh sect of Hindu ascetics. Among aboriginals, apart from its wide use in the Pacific area, certain sections of the Garo tribe, the Veddas of Ceylon and some of the Nicobarese tribes are reported as making it. In our area bark-cloth is prepared by the Bondos, Gadabas and Parengas, who spin the fibres of the *Calotropis gigantea* into thread on hand-spindles and weave it, mixed with coloured bazaar yarn, on little tension-looms. The Bondo cloth has been compared to that made by Konyak Naga women, with the difference that while the Bondo stripes are vertical, those of the Nagas are horizontal. Many different patterns are made by the Bondos as a result of shifting the arrangement of the variously coloured stripes.

The beautiful Gadaba cloth (Fig. 28) is attributed in one of their

legends to an attempt to imitate the stripes of a tiger. In fact the first Gadaba dress is said to have been a tiger's skin, which presently turned into the cloth used today. It is woven on a loom which is larger and a little more elaborate than that of the Bondo, and much more cloth has to be made, as Gadaba women wear both a skirt and a shawl. Different branches of this tribe make patterns of somewhat different colour and arrangement; I give here a sample from the hills near the Dudma Falls.

The spinning and weaving of cotton is generally taboo to the aboriginals of Middle India, but the Saoras spin cotton on clumsy home-made spindles. A legend says that cotton cloth was invented by the Supreme Being in order to give the Pano weavers something to do. When the Saora yarn is ready it is taken to a Pano neighbour for weaving. I have included a specimen of Saora cloth here, because it is obviously made according to a primitive pattern. The Saora, who deeply mistrusts his Pano friend, sits over him as he works, instructing him at every turn and watching to see that none of the yarn is stolen. The result is excellent, and the Hill Saora dress—whether it be the man's long-tailed loin-cloth (from which he gets his name of 'long-tailed Saora') or the simple women's skirt (Fig. 29)—always gives an impression of good tailoring.

FIG. 21. *Kuttia Kond girl, Duppi-aru, rewinding her girdle after a bath. Pringeli, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

FIG. 24. *Lekhari, a Kuttia Kond girl of Pringeli, Ganjam District, Orissa, wearing a skirt of plantain leaves.*

FIG. 25. *Hill Maria youths in dancing-dress; the skirts are of long strips of dried leaf. Itulnar, Abujhmar Mountains, Bastar.*

FIG. 26. *Bondo woman weaving bark-cloth on a small tension-loom at Mundlipada, Koraput District, Orissa.*

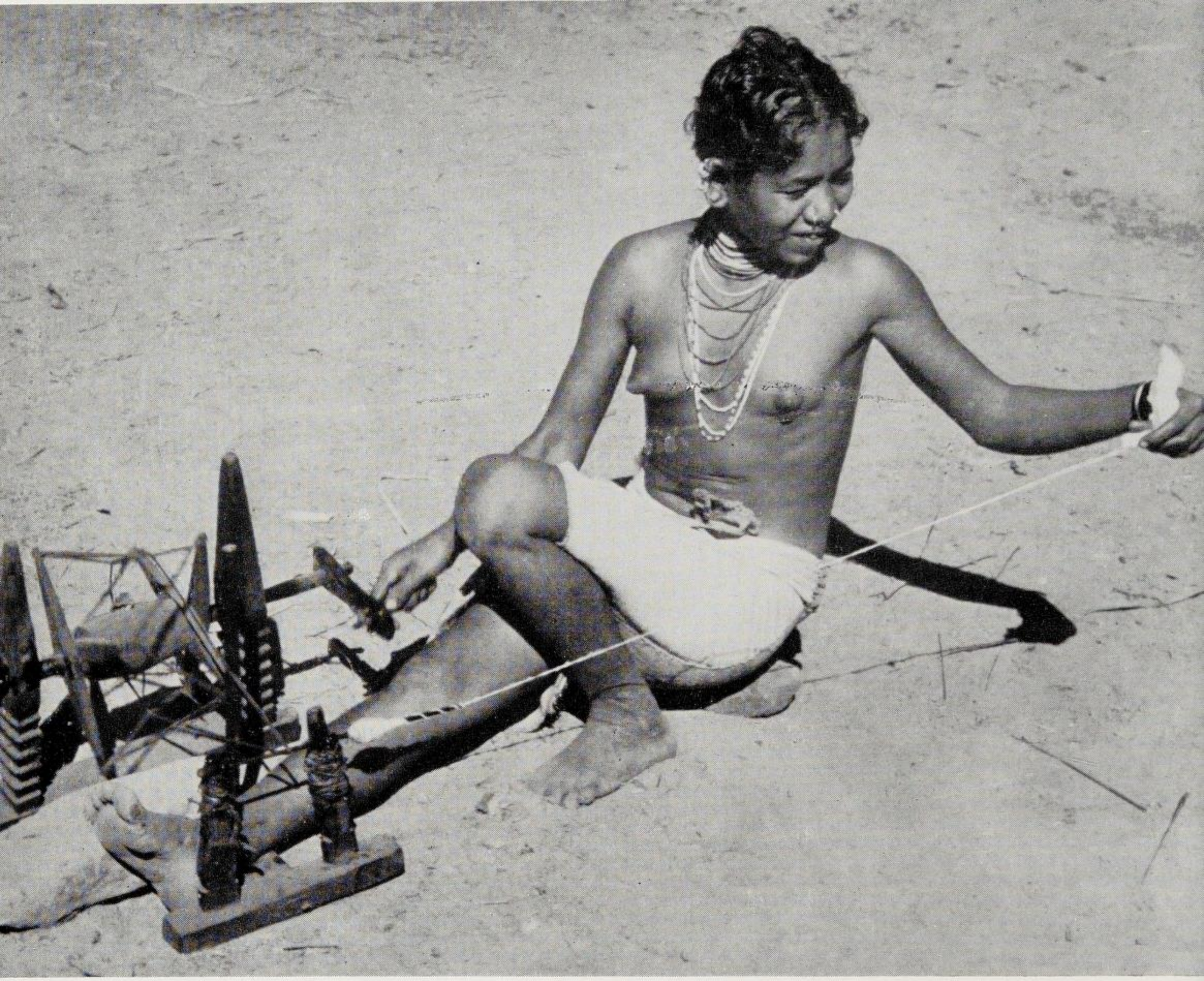


FIG. 27. *Saora girl of Tarebil, Ganjam District, Orissa, spinning yarn which will later be used by Pano weavers to make her skirt.*

FIG. 28. *Typical Gadaba woman's cloth of the area near the Dudma Falls, Orissa.*

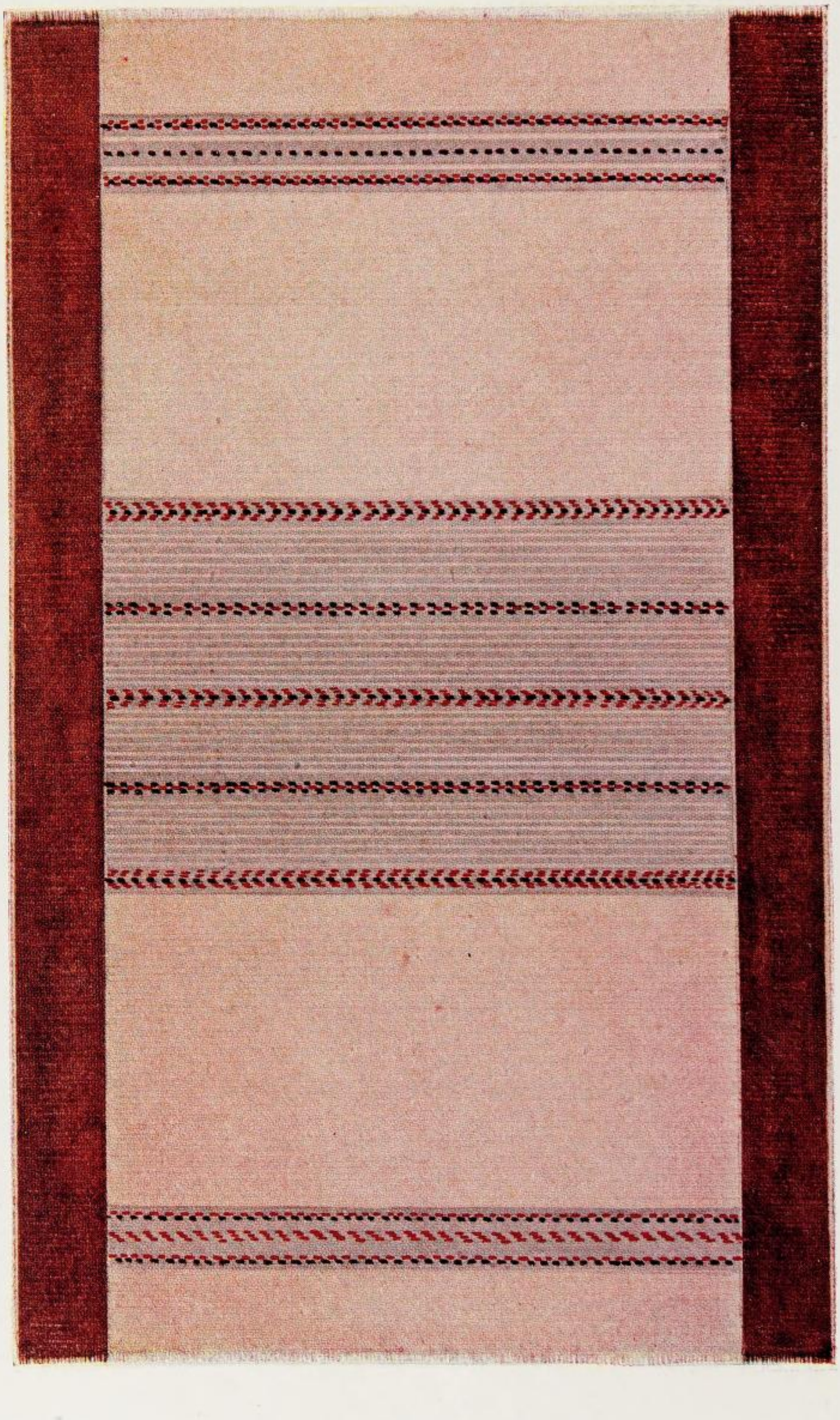


FIG. 29. *Characteristic Saora woman's skirt.*

FIG. 30. *Pangia Kond girl preparing cotton-yarn on a hand-spindle. Bondri, Koraput District, Orissa.*

FIG. 31. *Gadaba woman pounding a ball of shredded bark preparatory to making it into yarn. Kusambo, Koraput District, Orissa.*

IV

The Cowrie in Tribal Art

THE BEAUTIFUL SHELL *Cypraea moneta* is used widely for decoration, often no doubt with a serious latent purpose. The Lamana gypsies who travel all over Middle India have undoubtedly had a great influence in extending the popularity of the shell, for they may be regarded as specialists in its use. Their women attach it to the plait into which they weave their hair. They sew it into the borders of their skirts. They use it on their jackets in clusters resembling stars or flowers. They make it into fringes to hang over the heads of their pack-bullocks and into garlands to put about their necks. They sometimes make attractive hand-bags with a cowrie ornament (Fig. 37). Their example has been followed throughout the country.

Some years ago, a discussion in *Man*, inaugurated by M. A. Murray, revealed considerable difference of opinion as to what the cowrie really means. The controversy exposed four main positions—that the shell represents the human eye and is chiefly used as a homoeopathic charm against the Evil Eye; that it is a sex symbol representing the vulva; that it is a surrogate of life and important for its vitalizing power; and that it is simply an ornament, gaining its popularity from the fact that it looks nice and was once used as currency—coins being a favourite and lucky form of decoration.

There is much to be said for the view that the cowrie represents an eye, half-closed with the lashes on either side. In Assam cowries are actually used as eyes in carved images of the human form. In Melanesia and Borneo they are found serving the same purpose in reconstructed skulls. They were inserted as eyes into the orbits of mummies; the Tiv of Nigeria put them in the sacred 'voice-disguisers' which were fashioned like human heads; they appear as eyes in the

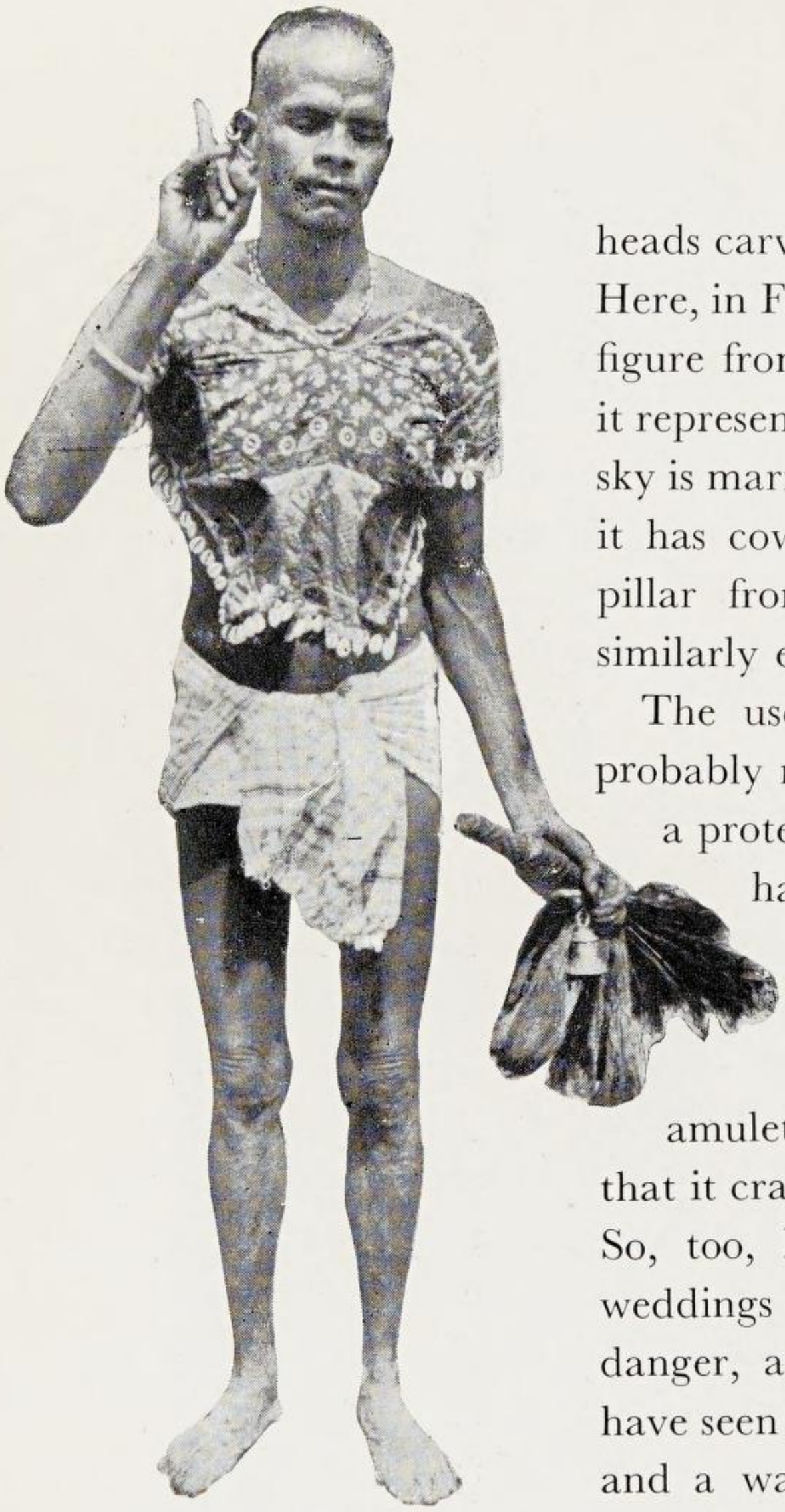


FIG. 32. *Muria magician wearing a woman's jacket with decorations of cowries and peacock-feathers.*

heads carved on lime-holders in New Guinea. Here, in Fig. 131, will be found a carved female figure from the banks of a pond in Mandla; it represents the spirit of the pond to which the sky is married to ensure a good supply of rain; it has cowrie eyes. The elaborate wedding-pillar from the same district (Fig. 78) is similarly equipped.

The use of cowries by the Lamanas is probably motivated by the belief that they are a protection against the Evil Eye; this tribe has to travel continually in unfamiliar country where hostile magic may be expected. It is an old belief in India that the cowrie worn as an amulet has such sympathy with the wearer that it cracks when an evil glance falls upon it. So, too, Dhulia boys engaged to dance at weddings (Fig. 35), always a time of magical danger, adorn themselves with the shells. I have seen Dom dancers in the Santal Parganas and a wandering Gondhali beggar (Fig. 34) on the other side of India adopt the same precaution.

In Bastar the aboriginals use the cowrie as a prophylactic again magical dangers generally, but not specially against the Evil Eye with which they are not greatly concerned; the Murias and Marias put a string of cowries round an ailing baby's throat; they tie a cowrie to a shoe and hang it outside a village to stop evil getting in; they use it to charm the poison from a snake-bite and wave it round the head to bring down fever. Magicians are fond of

using women's jackets (Fig. 32) liberally adorned with the shell. The Juangs also use the cowrie as a protection against witches.

It may be concluded that the aboriginals use the cowrie for magical protection in general, but not particularly against the Evil Eye, the fear of which is more prominent in Hindu or near-Hindu culture. This suggests that the reason for its magical power is not its resemblance to an eye but that there is some other cause, perhaps its connexion with the currency.

Another school of thought, however, regards the cowrie as a fertility symbol, as 'essentially a female charm, founded on the supposed likeness between the human vulva and the opening of the shell when set upright'. Evidence has been assembled from Egypt, Senegal, Syria, old Japan, the British Cameroons and elsewhere in support of this contention. Elliot Smith was the first, I think, to propose the theory of the magical uses of the cowrie as a life-giver, an image of the one entrance into life closely associated with parturition and other fecundity cults. Against this, Murray has argued that the cowrie charm was worn as frequently by men and other male animals as by women, that it could never have been used as currency had it been regarded as representing the vulva; and

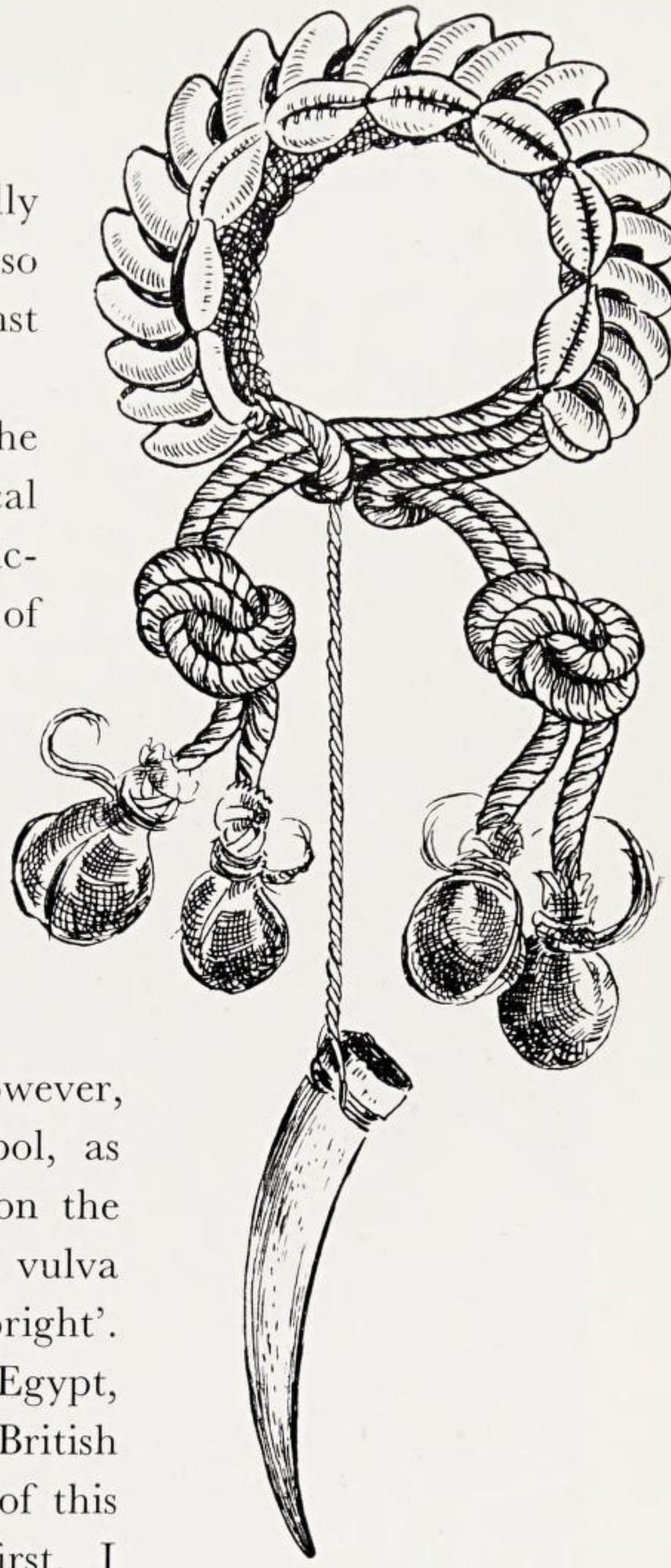
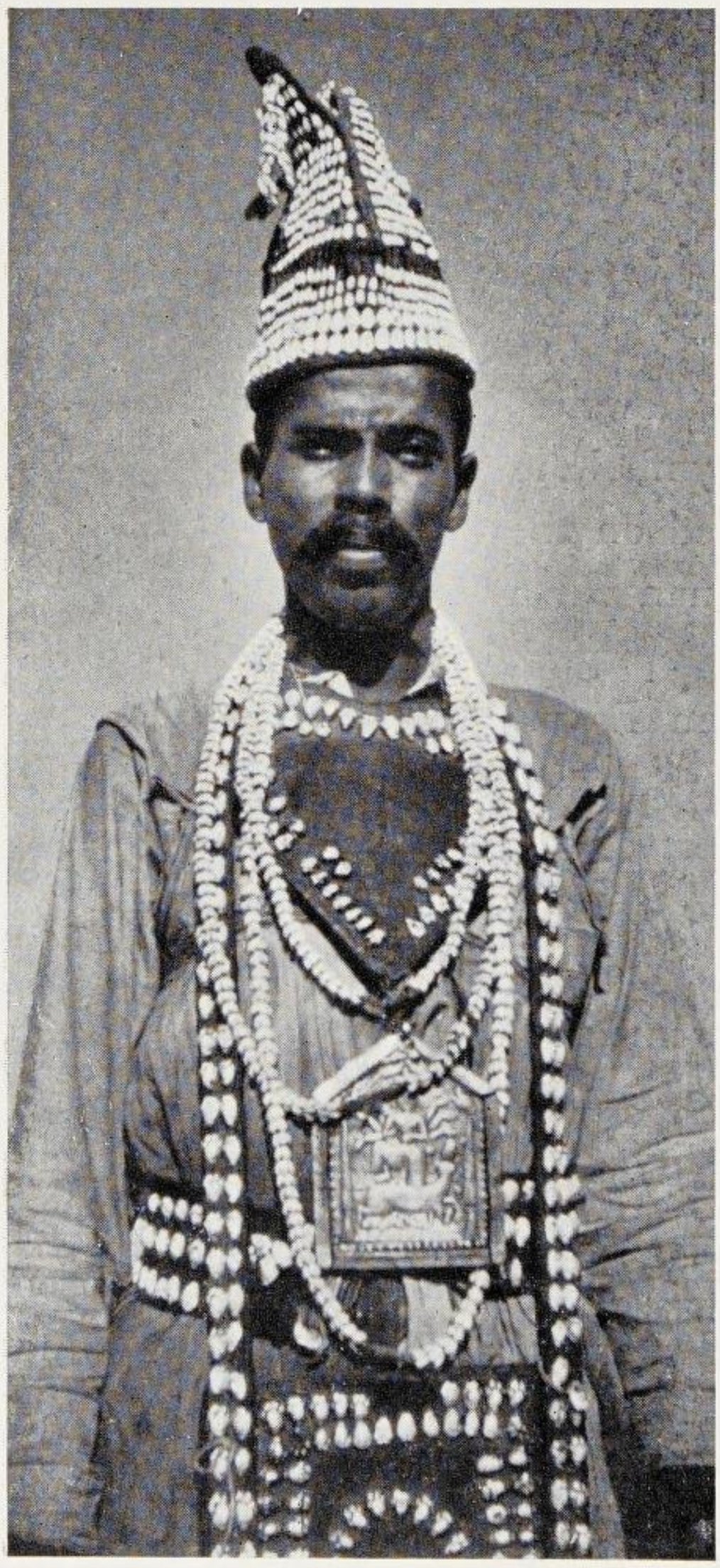


FIG. 33. *Jhoria-Muria ornament of cowries, brass bells and a boar's tush. Height,* 10½ *inches.*

she has stressed the supposed feeling of repulsion among most Eastern and early peoples (a feeling which only exists sporadically in Middle India) against touching a woman's genitalia with the hand, a repulsion which would extend even to anything that symbolized it. The presence of the cowrie in the battle helmet of a Formosan warrior, it is claimed, shows that the cowrie cannot represent the vulva, for no warrior would go into battle so adorned. On the other hand, if the cowrie is simply a good-luck charm its use in battle or in barter is readily understood.



Indian aboriginals do not, I think, look on the cowrie as one of their regular sex symbols. It is true, of course, that they—like a good many other people—can see sex in almost anything that has an aperture or a protuberance, and I have discovered two riddles where the cowrie is equated with the vulva and a Juang saying—'When the cowrie is on its side, it is an eye; when it is upright, it is the vulva; a little cowrie is a breast lying down, a belly standing up.' But this idea is rare. Indeed, the stylized representation of the vulva on tobacco-cases, combs, pillars, head-rests and the trees of sacred groves is sharply angular, a lozenge rather than a slit, and the clitoris is

FIG. 34. *Gondhali minstrel in the Dangs (Bombay Province) wearing cowries in honour of the goddess Bhawani, and as a protection against hostile magic.*

commonly depicted. And in ordinary life the aboriginals insist on the depilation of the pubic hairs which naturally removes an essential part of the resemblance. The cowrie in ornament is, however, a means of erotic attraction; a Juang youth once said to me, 'When we see a girl with cowries it always gives us a thrill.'

A third interpretation of the shell has been suggested by J. H. Driberg; his view is that the cowrie is a symbol of the vulva, not *qua* vulva, but of the vulva as a surrogate of Energy or Power, regarded as a life-giving Force. This means that it becomes 'effective in any life-giving capacity, whether it be fertility, spiritual immortality, or prophylaxis against the Evil Eye. The fact that it is frequently to be found among the impedimenta of sorcerers proves that it should not be regarded as a special prophylaxis against the Evil Eye, but as a conveyor of natural power.' I am not sure that primitive people ever think quite like that, but it is possible that the Maria or Saora might consider that if the shell brought him good luck, it had some kind of life-giving force. The Indian aboriginals, like primitive people elsewhere, use the cowrie at

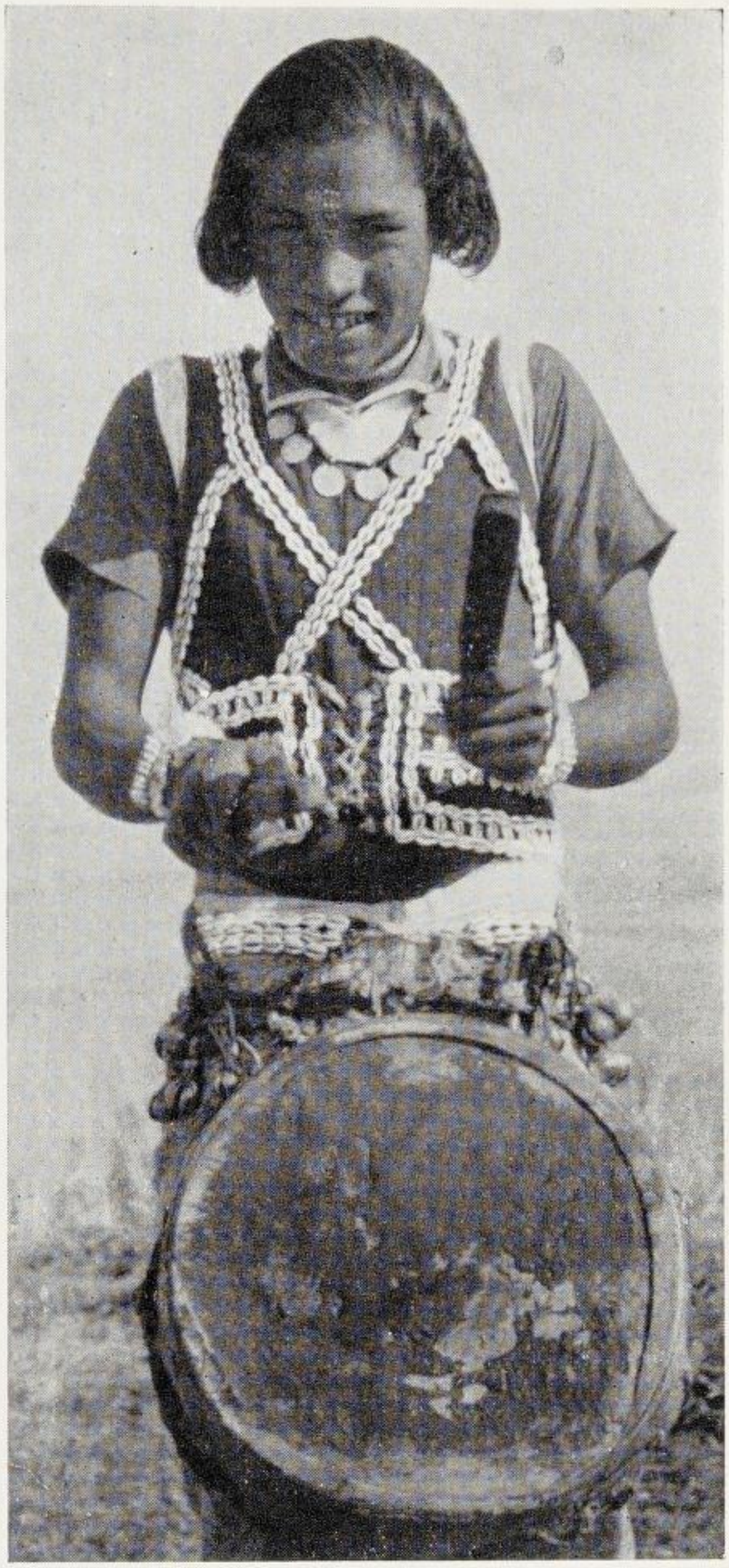


FIG. 35. *Dhulia drummer wearing a cowrie jacket as a protection against the magical dangers of a wedding. Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P.*

FIG. 36. *Muria youth with cowrie-decorated bag and elaborate comb. Jungani, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*

funerals, in marriages and during pregnancy—the shell, in fact, has some kind of vitalizing power which will make a marriage fertile and will triumph over death.

There is finally considerable and authoritative opinion that all this is over-intellectualized, and that the cowrie is little more than a pleasing and convenient object, a pretty thing which can readily be stitched on to cloth, made into a girdle, fixed in place with wax—its use in fact is entirely or at least mainly artistic. There is much to be said for this opinion. The aboriginals love to hang necklaces of silver rupees about their necks—formerly they used strings of cowries. Money maketh man, and anything to do with money is valued as an ornament. When the money is bright as a rupee or white and shapely as a cowrie, that is all the better for the primitive artist.

In Middle India, the use of the shell simply as a decorative motif is very varied. The Bison-horn Marias attach a string of the shells to the front of their horned head-gear (Fig. 38). The Hill Marias sew them on to their dancing-shields. The Jhoria-Murias use large quantities of cowries in the elaboration of their distinctive and delightful festal attire; they hang strings of them as streamers from the head-dress and other streamers from the horned and ornamented sticks carried over the shoulders. All Murias make girdles of the shells; they fashion them into armlets; they attach them to tobacco-cases, hair-pins and combs; they hang them in little bunches with bells from the waist.

Muria, like Juang, girls are fond of wearing cowries in their hair. Sometimes they put great bunches of them to cover the entire back of the head. Bondo women, who have no hair to decorate, put strings of cowries among the great mass of neck-ornament they affect. Korku girls wear cowries in their necklaces, making them into flower-like patterns with beads. Gond and Pardhan girls use the cowrie as a fastener or button in the middle of a multicoloured bead-necklace.

FIG. 37. *Lamana handmade bag with cowrie attachments, from Bilaspur District, C.P. Breadth,* 8 *inches.*

This catalogue could be continued almost indefinitely; I have restricted it to examples I have noted myself; were I to start turning over the books, we should run into many pages. But I think the point is made; whatever latent values the cowrie has, its primary use in aboriginal India is artistic rather than magical. It is also, I have no doubt, lucky, a prophylactic against malicious magic, fertile and vitalizing. But above anything else it is a very beautiful thing, with its white and shapely curves, its delicate hairs, its central line—and because of its beauty the aboriginals like to use it.

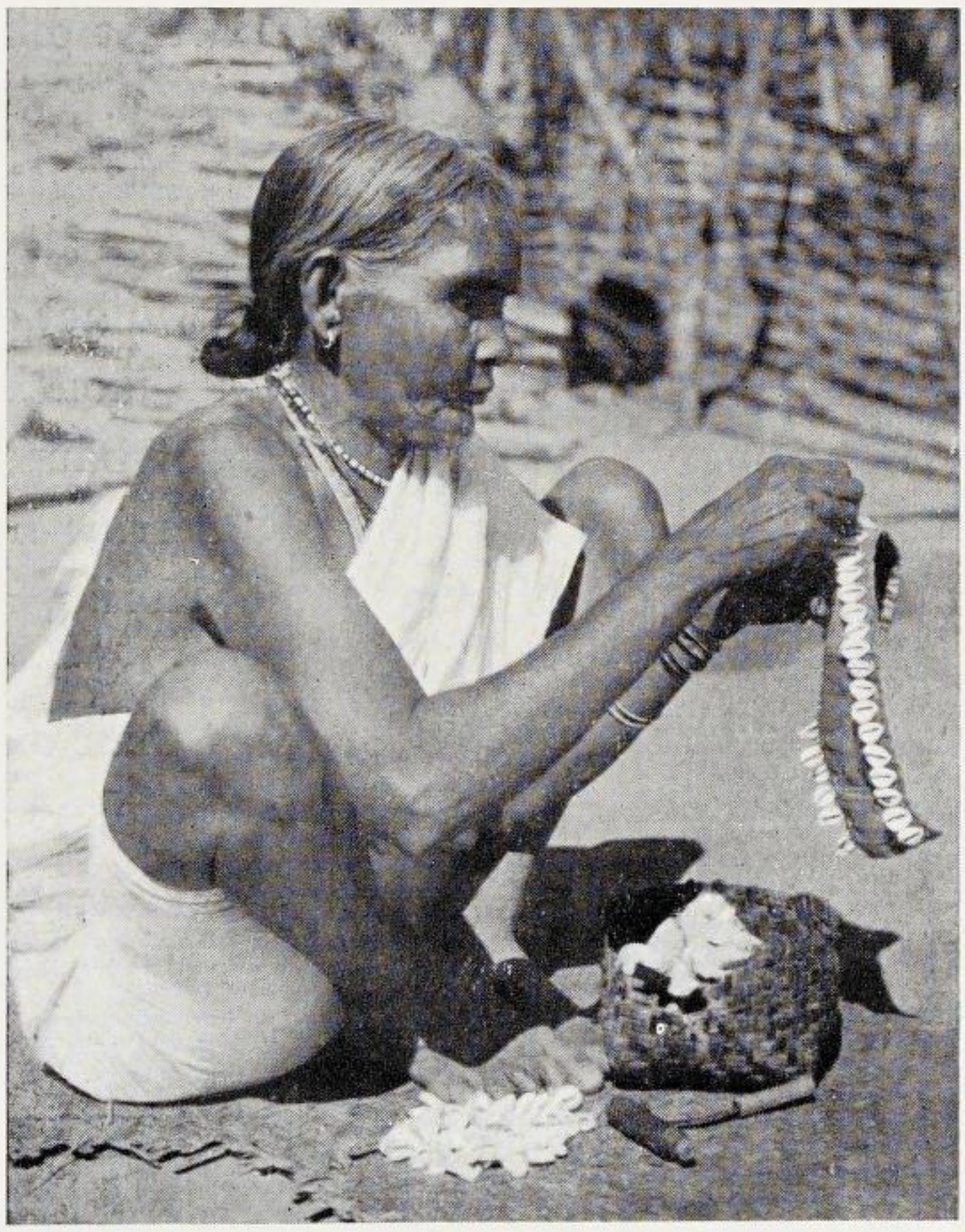


FIG. 38. *Lamana woman prepares a fringe of cowrie shells for a Bison-horn Maria head-dress.*

V

The Comb

As a decorative motif the comb is of great antiquity in India; it is common on the interiors of Susian bowls, and it is featured on many painted sherds from Mohenjo-daro. As a form of decoration in Middle India I have found it carved on doors and pillars in the Muria dormitories and I give two examples (Figs. 39 and 41) where it occurs as a pattern on Saora doors. It is also found in the Saora religious pictographs, for the divine or ancestral beings in whose honour it is made cannot live without this useful object.

When we turn to the actual combs we find that only a few tribes exert themselves to make them shapely or decorative. More and more, drab and commonplace wooden rakes from the bazaars are banishing any kind of creative decoration from this field as from all others. Some tribes still make their own combs, though they do not decorate them. The Konds, for example, make charming little models on a simple pattern (Fig. 42) and the Baigas bind up sets of bamboo teeth with fine cord in a single (Fig. 40) or double (Fig. 43) herring-bone device.

In the elaborate decoration of combs, the Murias, as in so many other matters, lead the way. This is probably because to a Muria boy or girl a comb means a great deal more than it does to other people, for in the intimate life of the dormitory it plays a most important part. It is used to titillate the skin of back and arms. Like the tobacco-case it suggests romance and mutual service. It is one of the most popular forms of personal adornment; Muria youths make

Fig. 39. *Saora frieze, showing a series of combs, cut on a door at Gundripadar. Length, 6½ inches.*

combs for their girl friends who sometimes wear them arranged in rows across the head (Fig. 54). So exciting are these associations that there is a rule that a married girl must remove her combs within a certain time. It is normally taboo to use a comb belonging to someone else, for to do so is supposed to cause fever or headache.

Many combs are illustrated in *The Muria and their Ghotul*; of those shown here, one (Fig. 44) is twinned, revealing a symmetry rather unusual in aboriginal art; another (Fig. 45) represents a youth and maiden on horseback and apparently jousting, though why I do not know, unless it is in the lists of love; a third (Fig. 46) shows a deer—the horns are done in beeswax; and the fourth (Fig. 47) is a quite striking bird. These more elaborate combs are, I think, generally worn by the boy members of the Muria dormitories; the girls are content with simpler models but want plenty of them.

The conventional geometric motifs on these combs include the very ancient pattern of opposed triangles with alternate diagonal hatching (of which an excellent example, connecting predynastic Egypt and modern Bastar, will be found in Fig. 44), angular wavy lines, areas of cross-hatching, and the usual herring-bone bands. The *horror vacui*, characteristic of so much ancient art, is very evident here, as in Saora and Gond paintings; once the artist begins he cannot stop.

The Juang combs are in an entirely different style. Fig. 50 is a rather unusual example of a loop pattern with pendent tassels hanging from both the bellies and junctions of the loops. Loop patterns with very small caruncles all round the belly are found in Gond-Pardhan wall-decorations, but this Juang comb is an excellent example of a very old motif, which is found as a border in the Samarra pottery and at Harappa. In the Indian examples given by Starr, the pendants drop from the belly or from all parts of the loop; it is in the Tell Halaf examples that they are found hanging from the junction. Both styles appear in this little comb. On the third side, the loops become very small

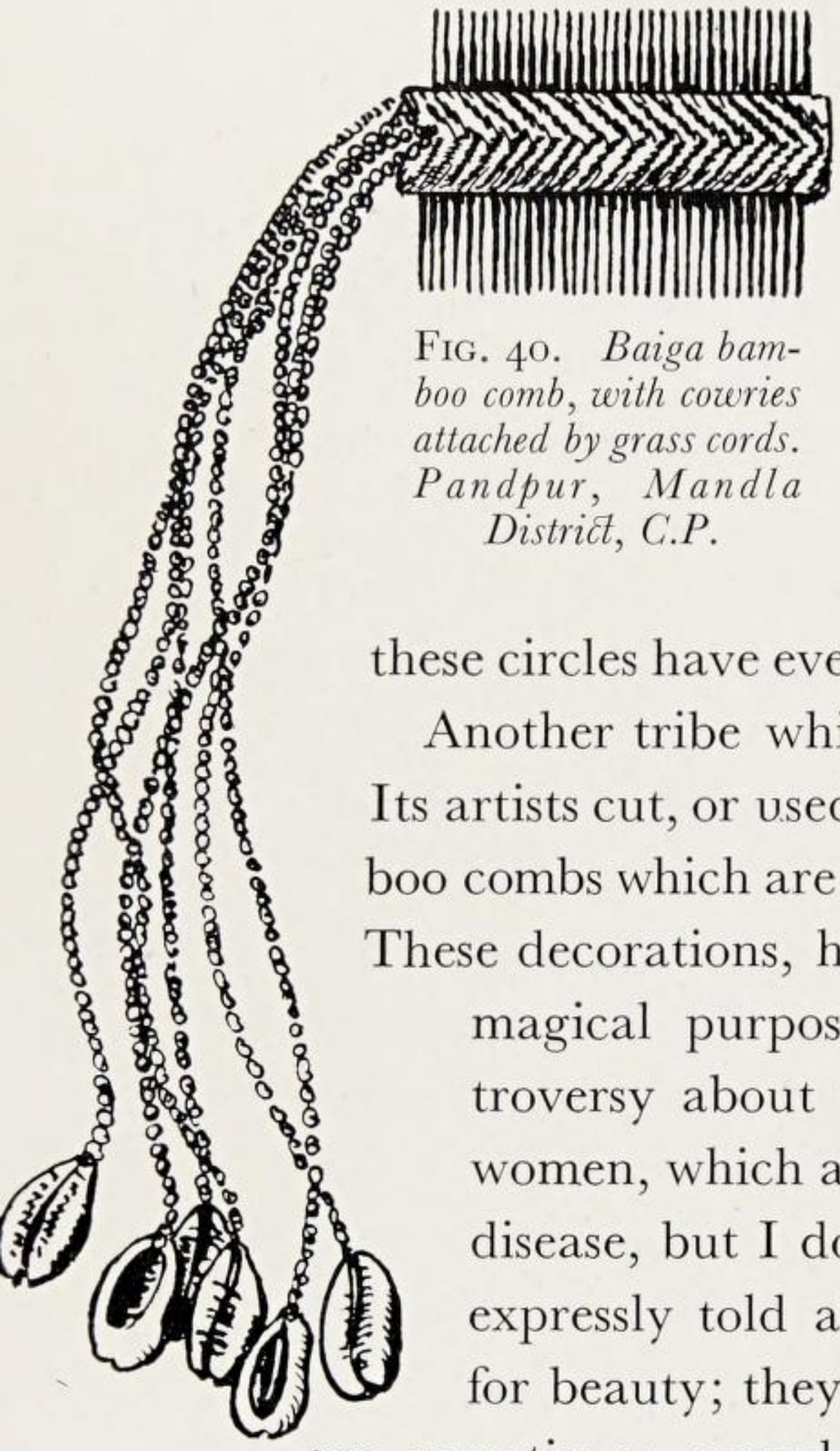


FIG. 40. *Baiga bamboo comb, with cowries attached by grass cords. Pandpur, Mandla District, C.P.*

circles with enhanced triangles depending from them—they may be stylized human figures.

The enhancement in all the Juang combs is very elaborate. An unusual decoration will be remarked in Fig. 53 where five small circles hang from the bellies of the loops of a wavy line; these circles have even smaller circles attached to their circumference.

Another tribe which is distinguished for its combs is the Kadir. Its artists cut, or used to cut, ornamental geometric patterns on bamboo combs which are said to resemble those of the Negritos of Malaya. These decorations, however, appear to be conventional; there is no magical purpose behind them. There has been some controversy about the patterns on the combs worn by Semang women, which at one time were believed to be talismans against disease, but I doubt if this is true of any combs in India. I was expressly told about the Juang combs: 'The patterns are only for beauty; they have no other meaning.' The Muria combs are sometimes carved with phallic symbols, but their aim is not magical, but the very human one of arousing erotic interest.

For the comb is essentially an expression of love or friendship; it is the symbol of service as tobacco is that of generosity. In Mysore the comb is said to be the symbol—when used as a tattoo mark—of a happy married life. Among the Juangs the comb is a common gift of boys to girls in the course of the dancing expeditions on which they often meet their future wives. Juang girls in the dormitories steal combs from the boys and it is a point of honour for the victim to react properly. 'When a girl examines a boy's comb,' said a Juang, 'friendship quickly follows.'

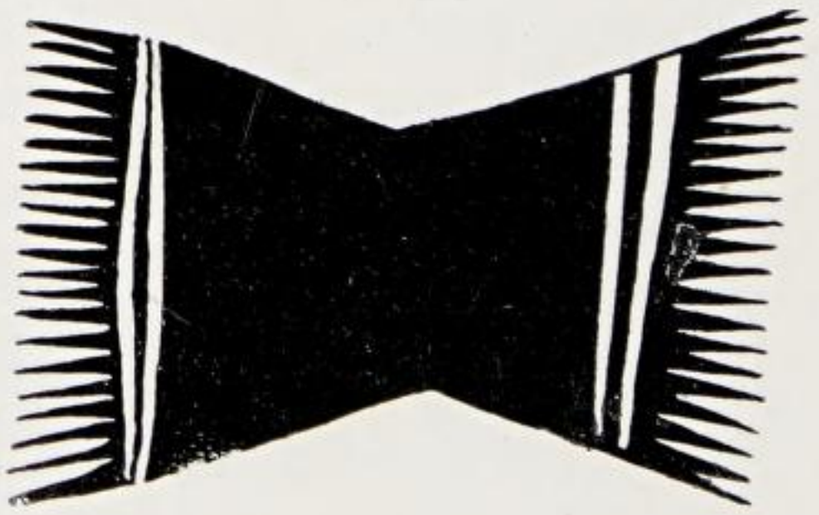


FIG. 41. *Conventional pattern of a comb carved on the door of a Saora house at Mandidi, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

The Comb

From all this naturally comes the use of the comb in marriage. The presentation of a comb by groom to bride is an essential part of a Muduvan wedding. A Juang groom gives his comb to his bride and she uses it to do his hair. The Kadir groom should make a special comb for his wife and give it to her during the ceremony. At a Kuki marriage the priest presents husband and wife with small combs, which no one but they may ever use. When a Kuki dies, his comb is buried with him and his relatives must break theirs and go about with dishevelled hair for some time before getting new ones. Many other tribes include the gift of a comb among the wedding-presents of groom to bride. Indeed, so important is the comb in aboriginal social life, and so intimate are its associations, that it is rather surprising that more attention is not paid to it, and that it is not more frequently adorned.

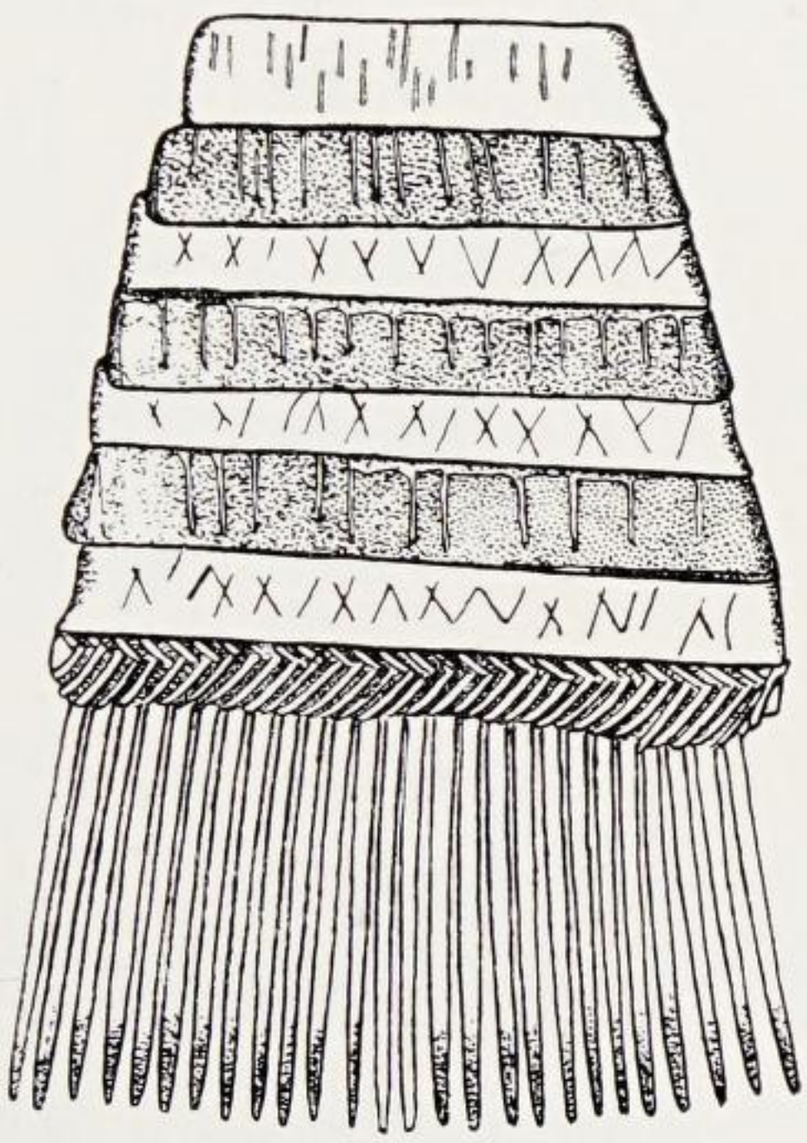
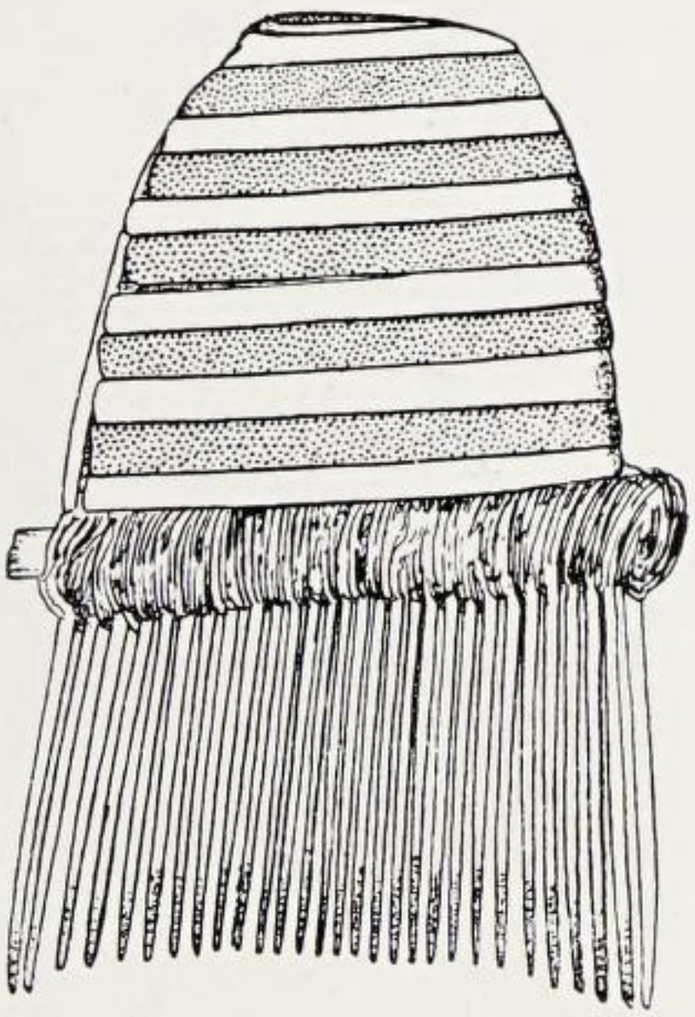
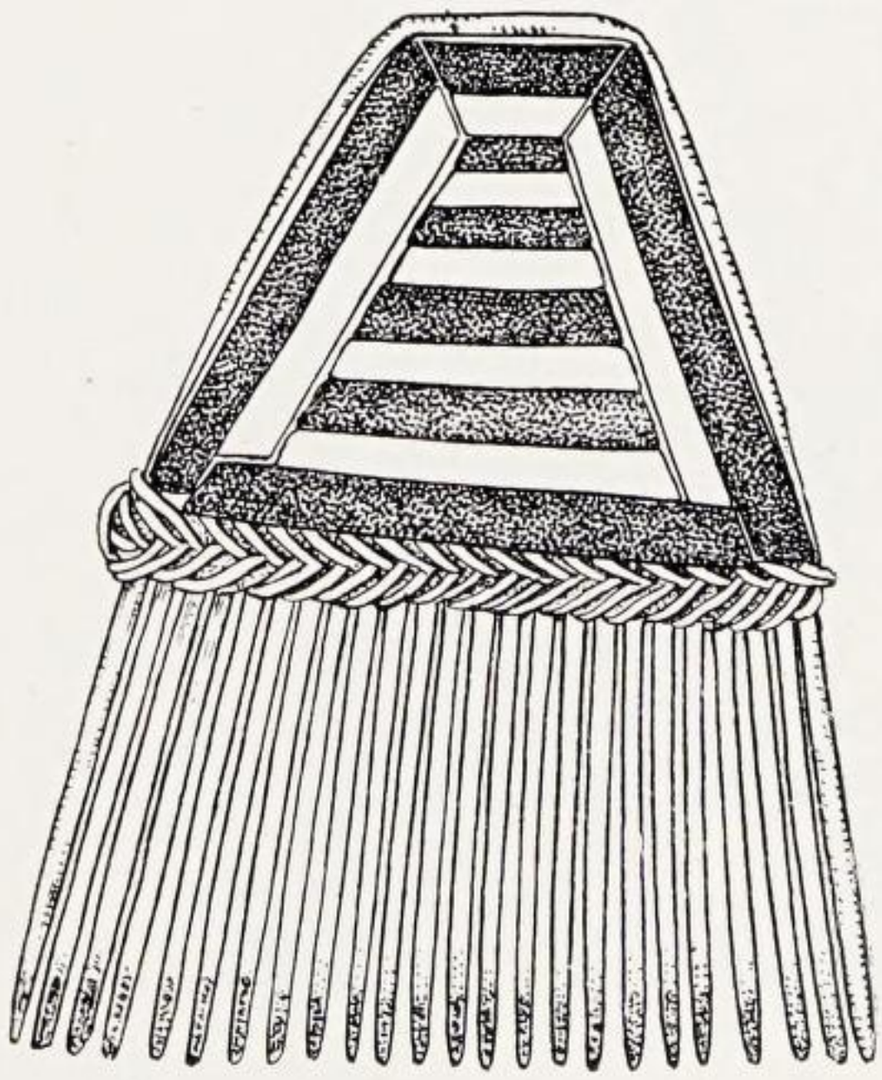


FIG. 42. *Three Kuttia Kond bamboo combs from Sutaghati, Pringeli and Sapir (Orissa) respectively. Actual size.*





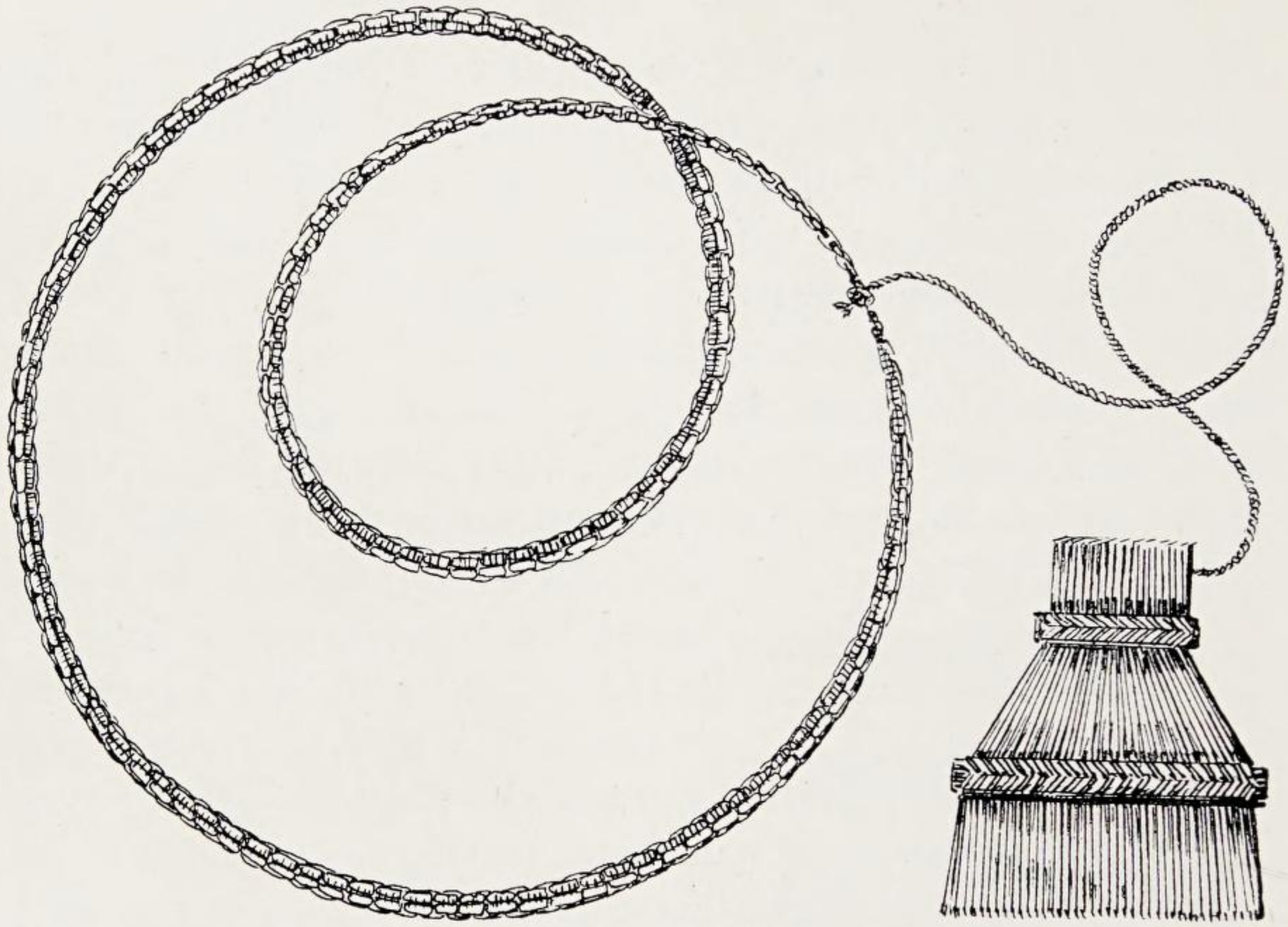


FIG. 43. *Baiga comb with a head-band of plaited grass. Bilaspur District, C.P. Diameter of head-band, 6¼ inches.*

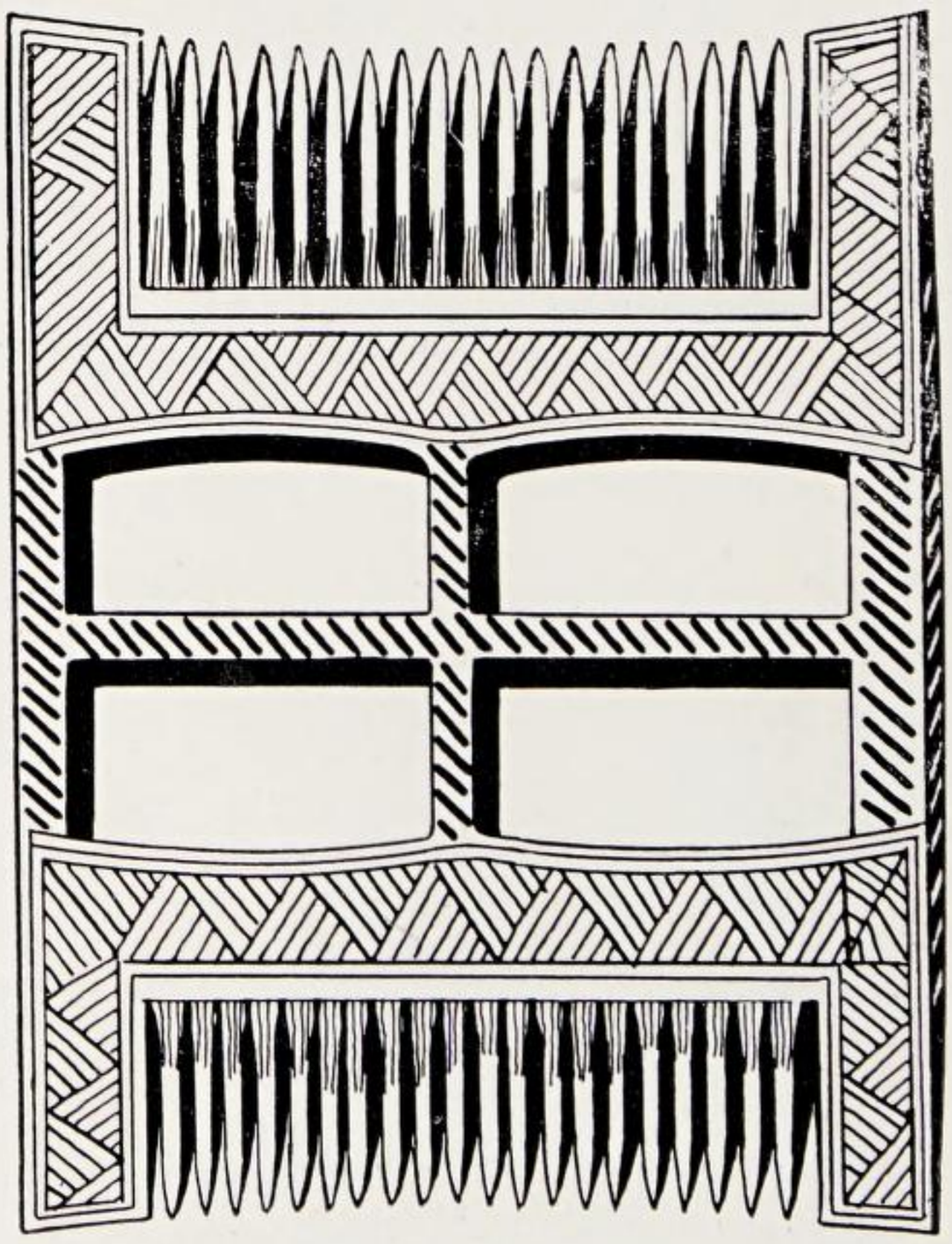


FIG. 44. *Muria wooden comb, from Bhanpuri, Bastar. Height, 4¾ inches.*

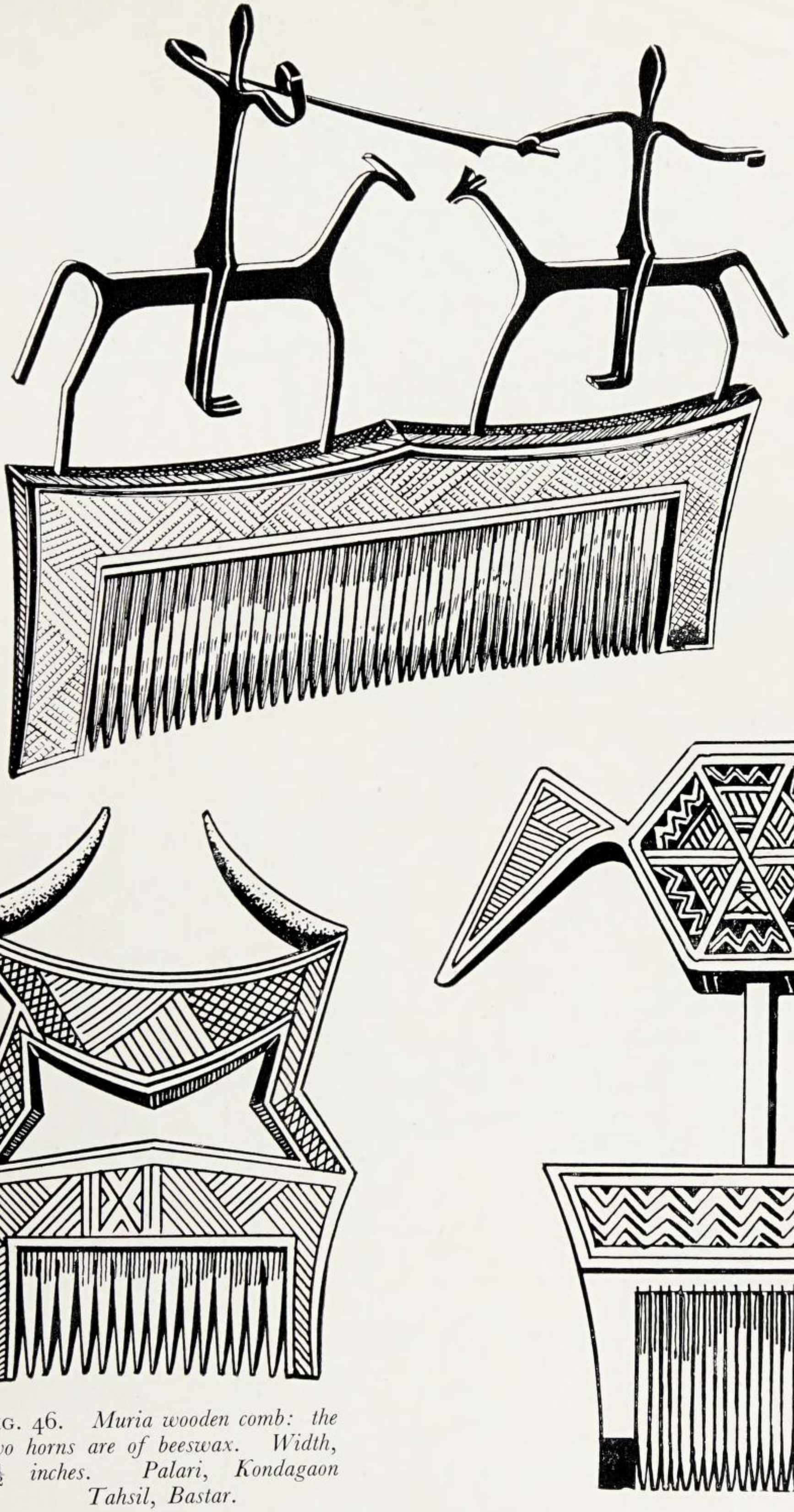


FIG. 45. *Muria wooden comb with metal figures. Width, 5 inches.*

FIG. 47. *Muria wooden comb. Height, $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Chandabera, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*

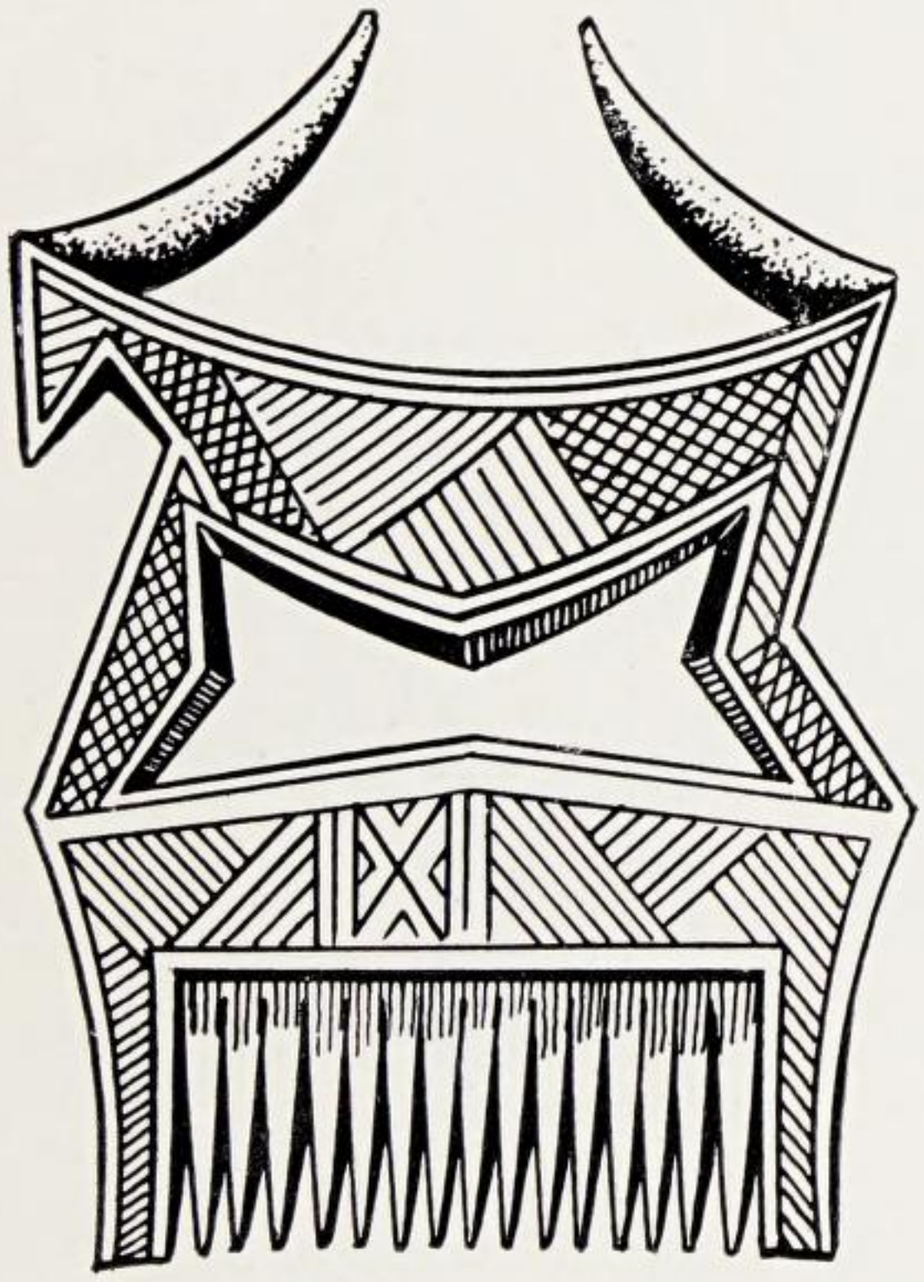
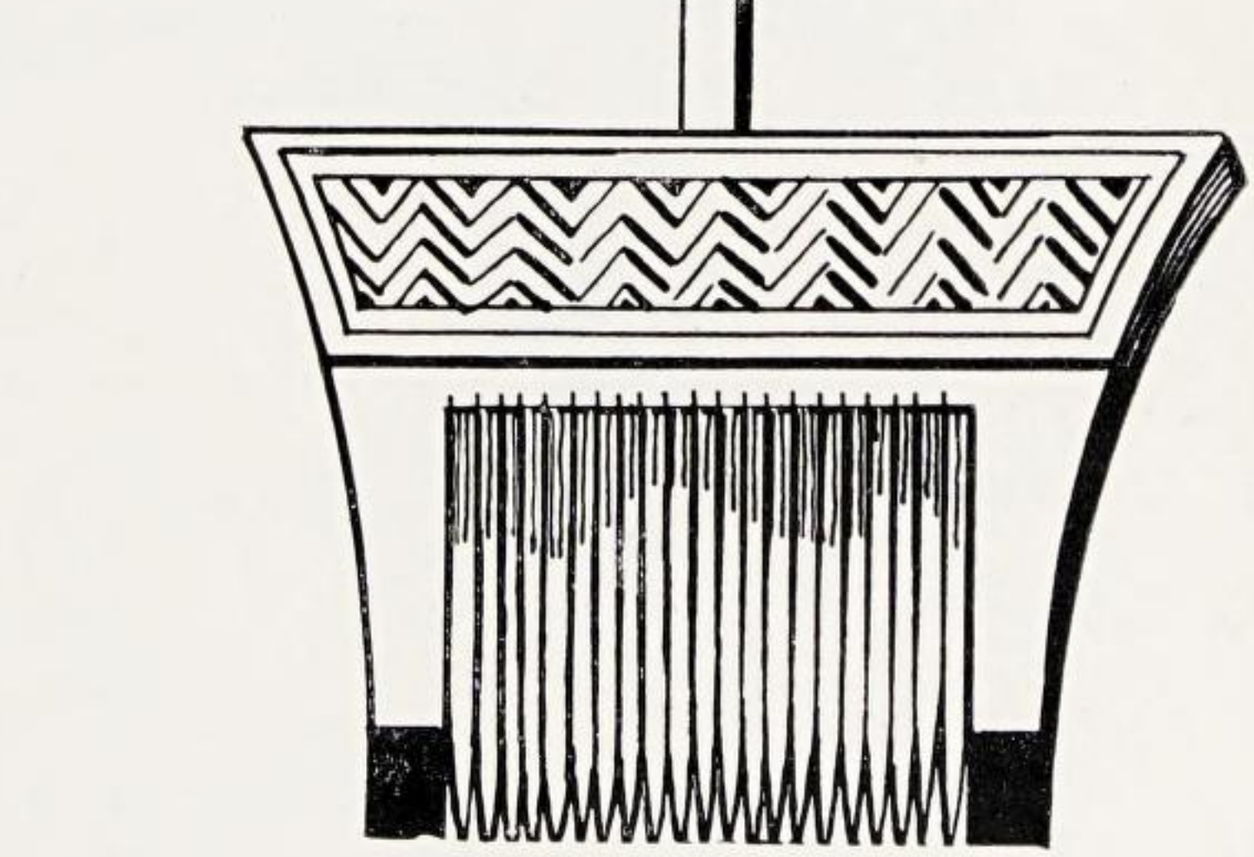


FIG. 46. *Muria wooden comb: the two horns are of beeswax. Width, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Palari, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*



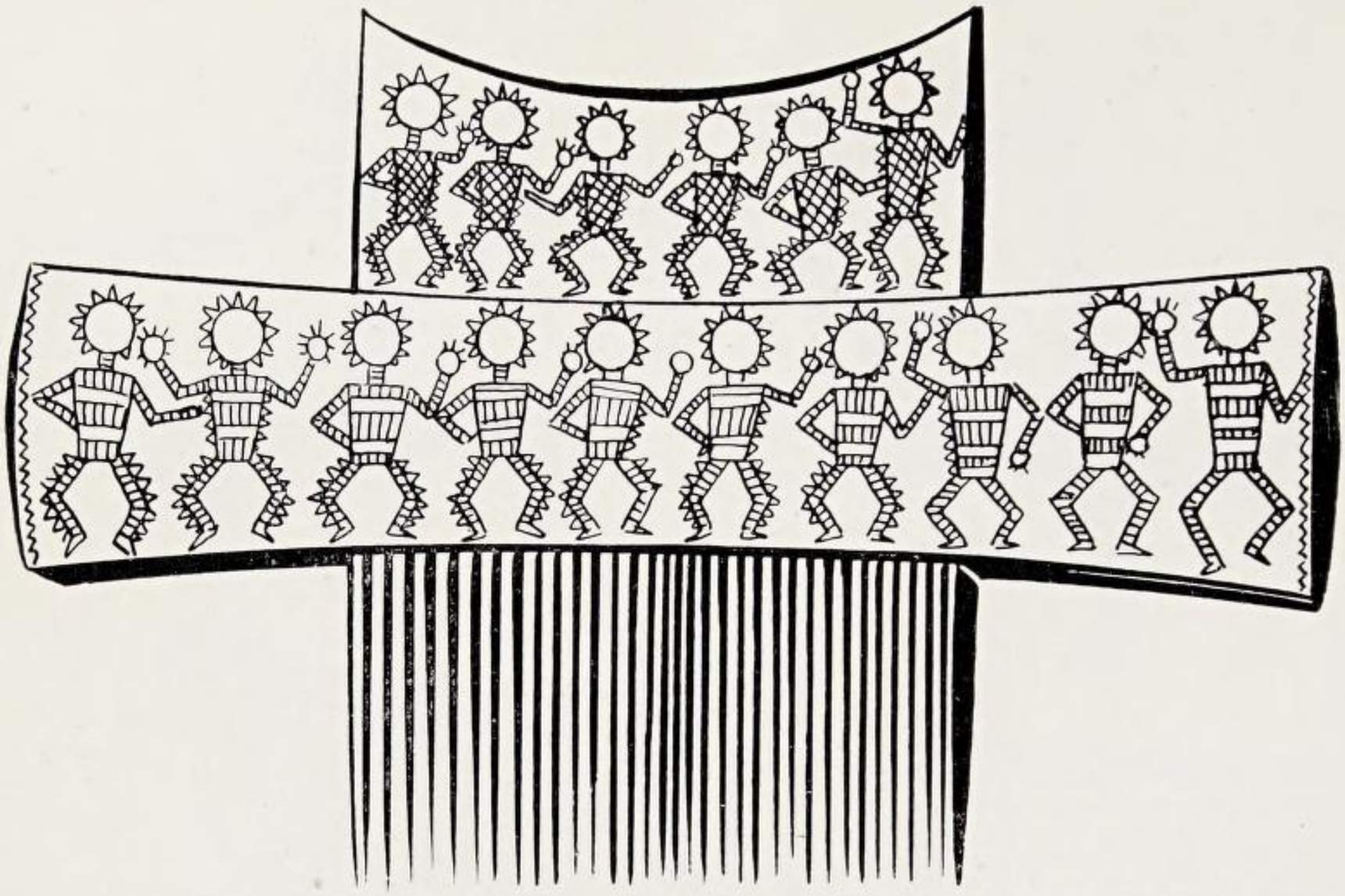


FIG. 48. *Juang comb carved from a bit of bamboo. Actual size. Korba, Keonjhar, Orissa.*

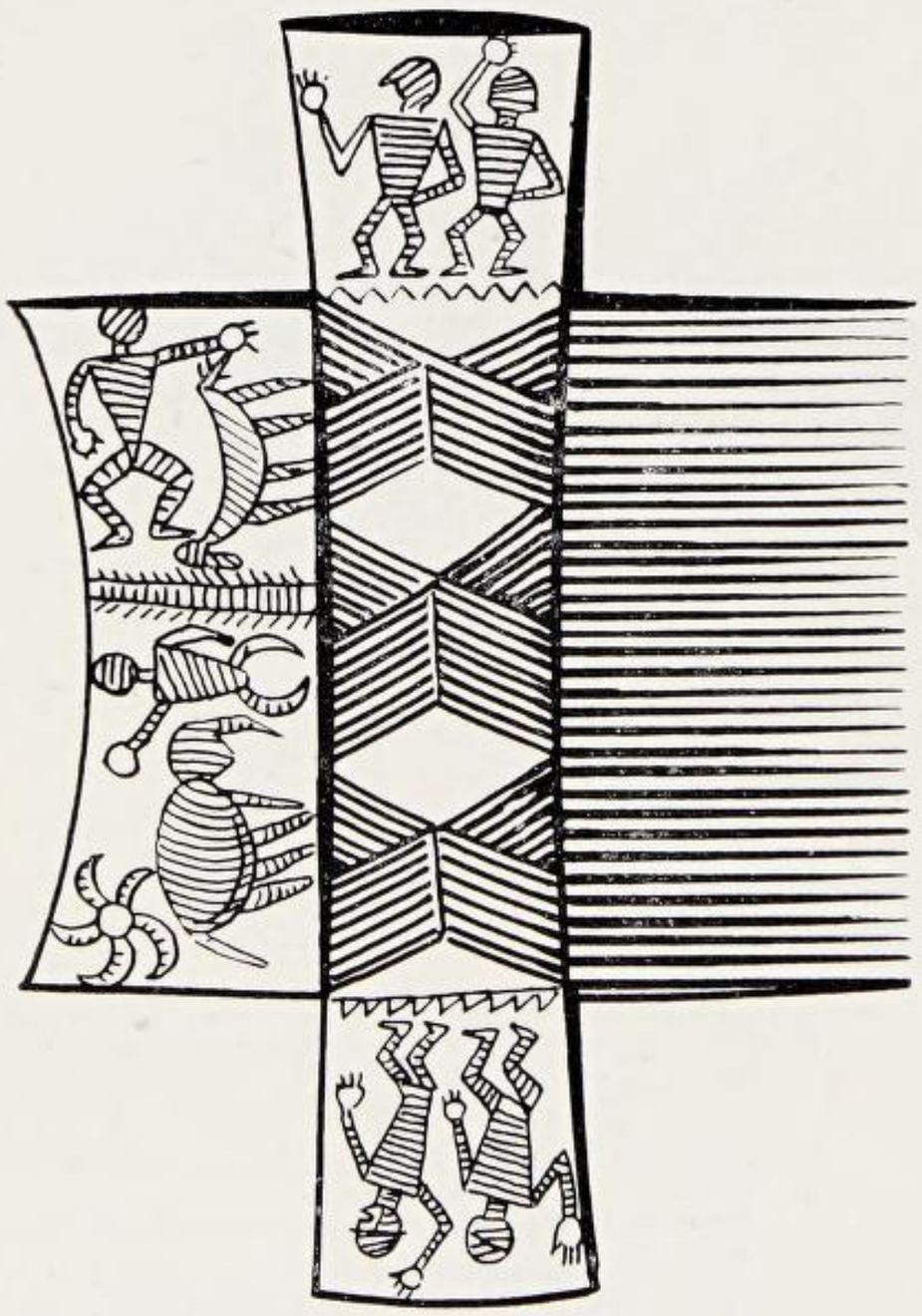


FIG. 49. *Juang comb. Actual size. Korba, Keonjhar, Orissa.*

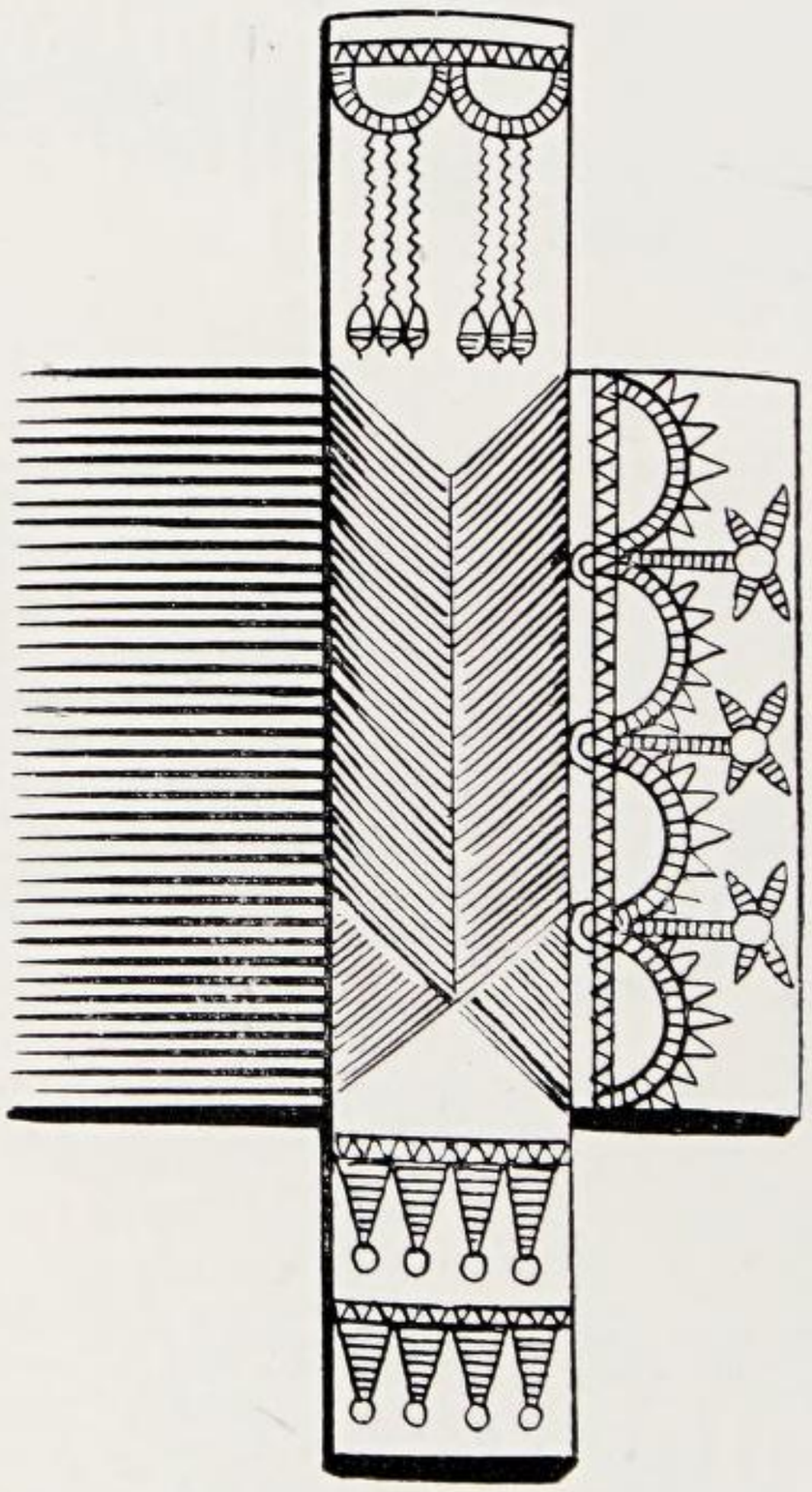


FIG. 50. *Juang comb. Actual size. Korba, Keonjhar, Orissa.*

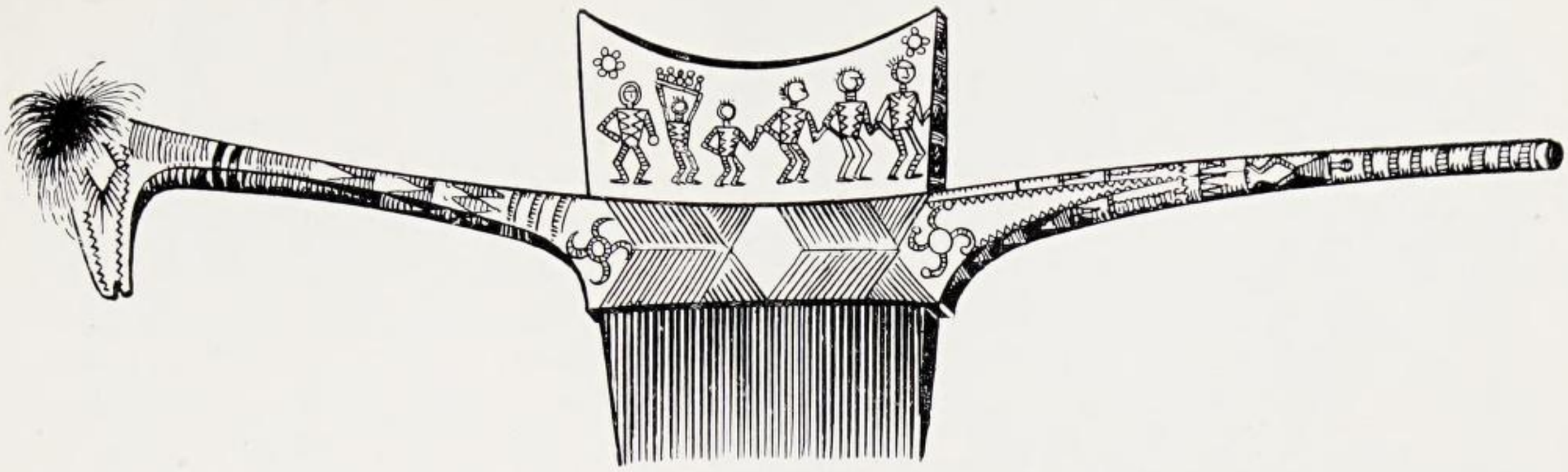


FIG. 51. *Juang comb of bamboo wood. It is decorated with a tuft of Scarlet Minivet feathers. Length, 6 inches. Balipal, Keonjhar, Orissa.*

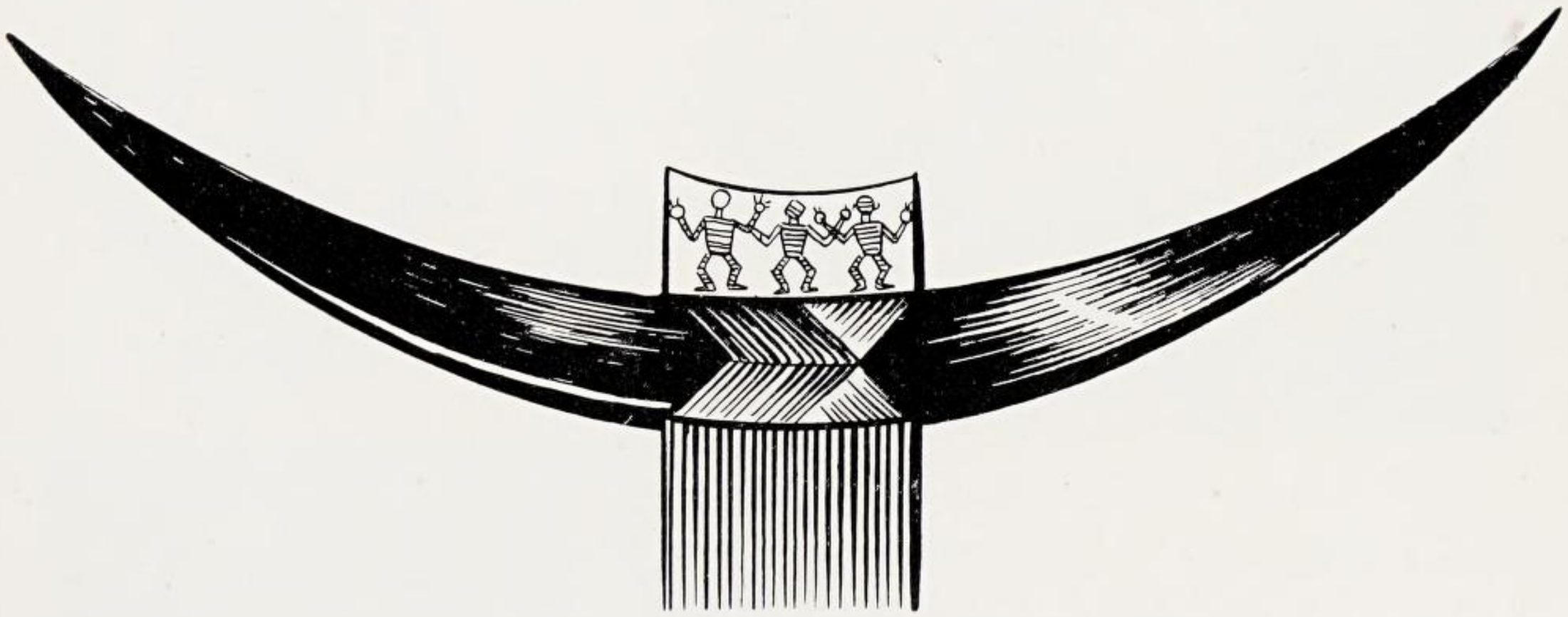


FIG. 52. *Juang comb. The bow is of dark ebony wood highly polished. The teeth are of bamboo. Length, 6 inches. Balipal, Keonjhar, Orissa.*

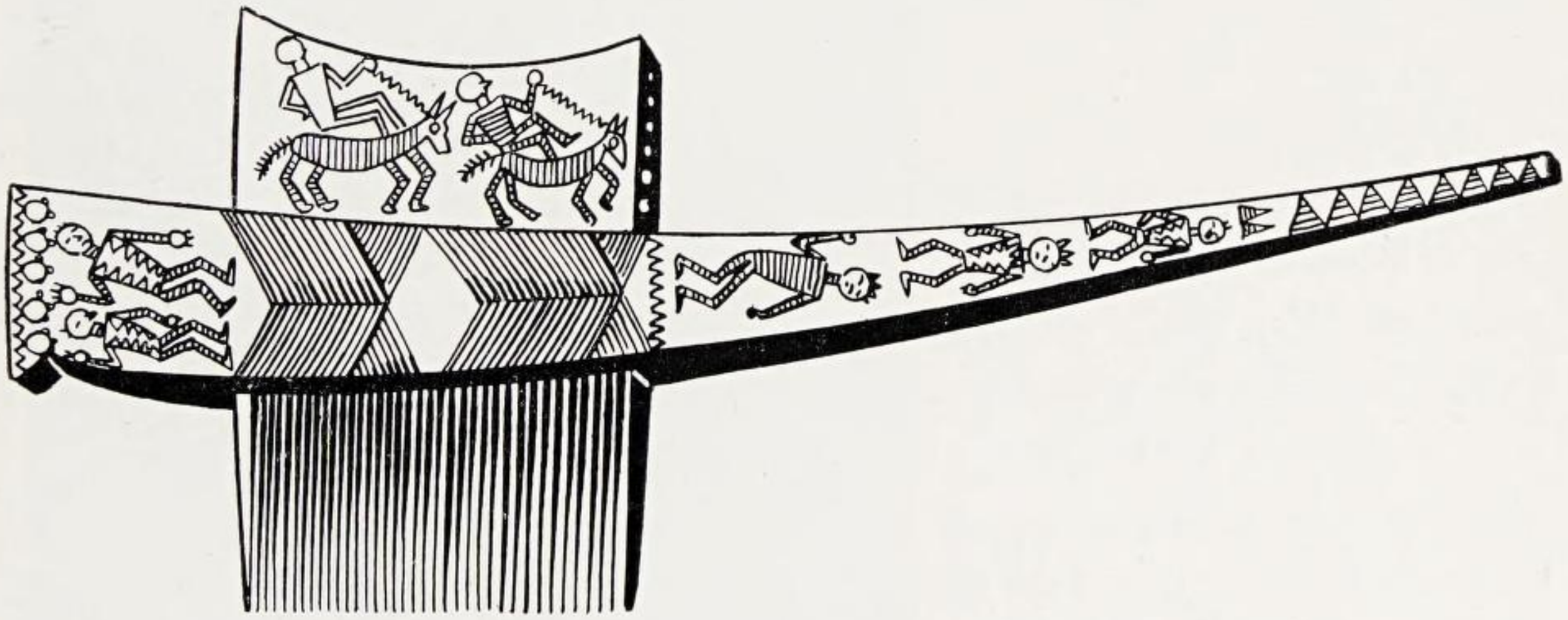


FIG. 53. *Juang comb of bamboo. Actual size. Korba, Keonjhar, Orissa.*

FIG. 54. *Muria girl wearing metal-backed wooden combs. Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*

FIG. 55. *Muria youth preparing wood to make a comb. Chandabera, Bastar.*

VI

The Head-dress

FIG. 56. *Bison-horn Maria head-dress.*

EXCEPT AT FESTIVALS and dances, the aboriginals of Middle India put very little on their heads. On ordinary occasions they are content with a wisp of cloth tied round as a sort of turban, some flowers or feathers stuck in the hair, a head-band of brass or beads.

But for the dance, which—in another medium—is perhaps the greatest artistic achievement of the tribes, picturesque and impressive head-dresses are sometimes made. The Bison-horn Marias make the most splendid of the horned head-dresses. Otherwise they are not very artistically inclined; I never found, and I do not think Grigson ever found, carving or painting among them. It is in the head-dress and the dance that goes with it that they have found expression and liberation. The classical head-dress is of finely-polished bison-horns (Fig. 58), but bullock or buffalo horns (Fig. 57) can be used and I give a photograph (Fig. 59) of a Dorla wearing the antlers of the spotted deer. Occasionally a Maria may use the tushes of a wild boar or, if he wishes to be really modern, he may go to a Ghasia brass-smith and get him to make him a pair of brass horns by the *cire-perdue* process.

When not in use the head-dresses are dismantled and stored in bamboo baskets; Fig. 60 shows two Maria youths engaged in putting their gear together before a dance. Its foundation is a bamboo topee; on to this the horns are stitched and a plume from a peacock's tail and feathers of the jungle cock are attached to it by a bamboo rod. The topee is then tied round with coloured cloth, streamers being allowed

to hang down behind; an elaborate fringe of coloured cloth with cowrie tassels is stretched across the front and covers the face.

I never saw a Muria wearing horns, but I found one example of a Dhurwa (Fig. 61) in southern Bastar who had made an elaborate affair with wooden horns decorated with bands of bell-metal and tied round with coloured cloth and a lot of junk including a bit of a brass chandelier from the Palace at Jagdalpur—this tribe, it may be added, supplies the domestic servants for the Maharaja.

The Konds sometimes use brass horns (Fig. 62) at the Meriah festival when a buffalo (which is nowadays substituted for a human being) is sacrificed to the Earth Mother. The Konds also use the beak of the Great Hornbill (Fig. 63), placing it upright in a turban; the Marias also use the beaks, but in pairs, as substitutes for bison-horns. In Orissa the beak of this bird is regarded as lucky; I have seen it placed on the top of a newly-threshed and winnowed heap of grain to keep its fertility intact.

To understand the superb natural artistry of the horned head-gear at its best, it is necessary to attend a dance of a score or more performers. To watch the waving plumes, the tossing horns, the bright colours above the splendid thunder of the drums, is an unforgettable experience.

By comparison, the head-decoration of the more sophisticated tribes seems tawdry and artificial. Such is the head-gear of the civilized Saoras of Sarangarh or of the Bhattras who come to Jagdalpur to dance at the Dassera festival (Fig. 64). These head-dresses are generally made of coloured paper on a bamboo or cane foundation. The aboriginals of the Central Provinces now make their wedding-crowns in similar fashion; it is not an improvement. The introduction of paper is one of the many doubtful benefits bestowed on tribal art by education.

For the rest, head-decoration is largely a matter of tufts and feathers. The Bondos make a rather ingenious plume of balls of coloured cotton,

which is fixed to an iron loop that goes round the head and under the chin. The Saoras are specially fond of plumes of white crane's feathers. Baigas of both sexes stick feathers of the jungle cock or peacock in their hair. But women prefer flowers and their transient but exquisite flower-culture—especially of the marigold and hibiscus—lends beauty even to the poorest people.

FIG. 57. *Dorla-Maria of Konta Tahsil, southern Bastar, with buffalo-horn head-dress, photographed at a wedding.*

FIG. 58. *Bison-horn Maria youth of Borgum, Dantewara Tahsil, Bastar.*

FIG. 59. *Dorla-Maria of Konta Tahsil, southern Bastar, with head-dress of chital-stag antlers.*

FIG. 60. *Bison-horn Maria youths preparing their head-dress for a dance. Borgum, Dantewara Tahsil, Bastar.*

FIG. 61. *Dhurwa dancer with head-dress of wooden horns. Netanar, Jagdalpur Tahsil, Bastar.*

FIG. 62. *Kuttia Kond dancer with head-dress of brass horns with a small bell attached and a tuft of peacock-feathers. This fashion is now rare and may be seen only at the buffalo (Meriah) sacrifice for the Earth Goddess. Lankagarh, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

FIG. 63. *Kond youth wearing the bill of the Great Hornbill as a festal head-dress. Bondri, Koraput District, Orissa.*

FIG. 64. *Bhattra dancer at the Dassera festival with a head-dress of rather gaudy coloured paper, bits of glass and mica and beads. Jagdalpur, Bastar.*

VII

Tobacco-cases

THE TOBACCO PLANT, according to common legend, was originally an ugly unwanted girl who, dying unmarried, obtained the boon that her body should be transformed into something desired by all the world. The erotic associations of tobacco—an idea unfamiliar to the Western world—are suggested in this story; it also indicates the high place which the fragrant leaf has in the affections of tribal India. Here the chewing of betel is rare (hence the absence of decorated spatulae common in New Guinea) and the tribesmen specialize instead in the chewing or smoking of tobacco.

The habit has not inspired as much artistic effort as we might have expected. The smokers are less artistic than the chewers, for they have not yet reached the stage of keeping cigarettes in cases and, except among the Phom Nagas, I have never seen a carved pipe in a tribesman's hand; ornamented pipes are indeed sometimes used, but they are bought in the bazaars; and the smokers keep their tobacco in little bags or tied in their loin-cloths. There is little opportunity for creative decoration here.

But the tribesmen who chew their tobacco powdered very finely can use cases into which the leaves of the smokers would not go. The result is that the Saoras, Bondos, Juangs and most of the Central Provinces tribesmen who smoke have no decorated containers, while those who also chew—the Marias and Murias and Konds—use wooden containers which they ornament with great care.

Many of the Muria cases are illustrated in *The Muria and their Ghotul* and I reproduce a few of the more remarkable here. Their geometrical decorative patterns, which are elaborate and varied, deserve careful study. Among the motifs used will be found the

curved band enhanced with a herring-bone design (Fig. 69); the zigzag band; the chevron; the triangle. Fig. 69 shows the interlacing circle which is as old as Harappa—here the pattern breaks down into a row of saltires.

Fig. 71 is of special interest. The motif of contiguous upright and inverted triangles individually differentiated by diagonal hatching sloping alternately right and left has been traced by Starr from Mesopotamia to Baluchistan and it has been found among the designs of Amri and Jhukar; it may be an imitation of a common weave in matting.

The wheel motif is also interesting and unusual. Fig. 68 obtains the wheel effect by a pattern of sharply pointed isosceles triangles with alternate diagonal hatching radiating from a centre, the whole being surrounded by elaborately enhanced concentric bands. Fig. 67 is a beautifully constructed ornament; it is made in three pieces which are carefully fitted together on to the spokes. Equally well made is the fish-case (Fig. 72), which consists of a number of pieces cut out and fitted together, the joins being concealed with a thin coating of metal. A spike enables the case to be carried in the hair or turban. The scales, which are silvered, are indicated by oblique cross-hatching; down the middle runs a wavy line which may represent the bones or the river in which the fish lives.

To ask for tobacco, in Bastar and Orissa, is a common approach to intimacy and the gift often marks the beginning of an intrigue. Many of the cases have conventional marks which are intended to excite a lover, and Muria youths have told me that some of the designs are imitated from those sometimes to be observed on a woman's areolae. The stopper is the nipple, and where the cases are round there is an easy suggestion of the breast. It might, indeed, be suggested that one source of the geometrical pattern is to be found in the lines round the areolae. This is particularly true of hatching and cross-hatching.

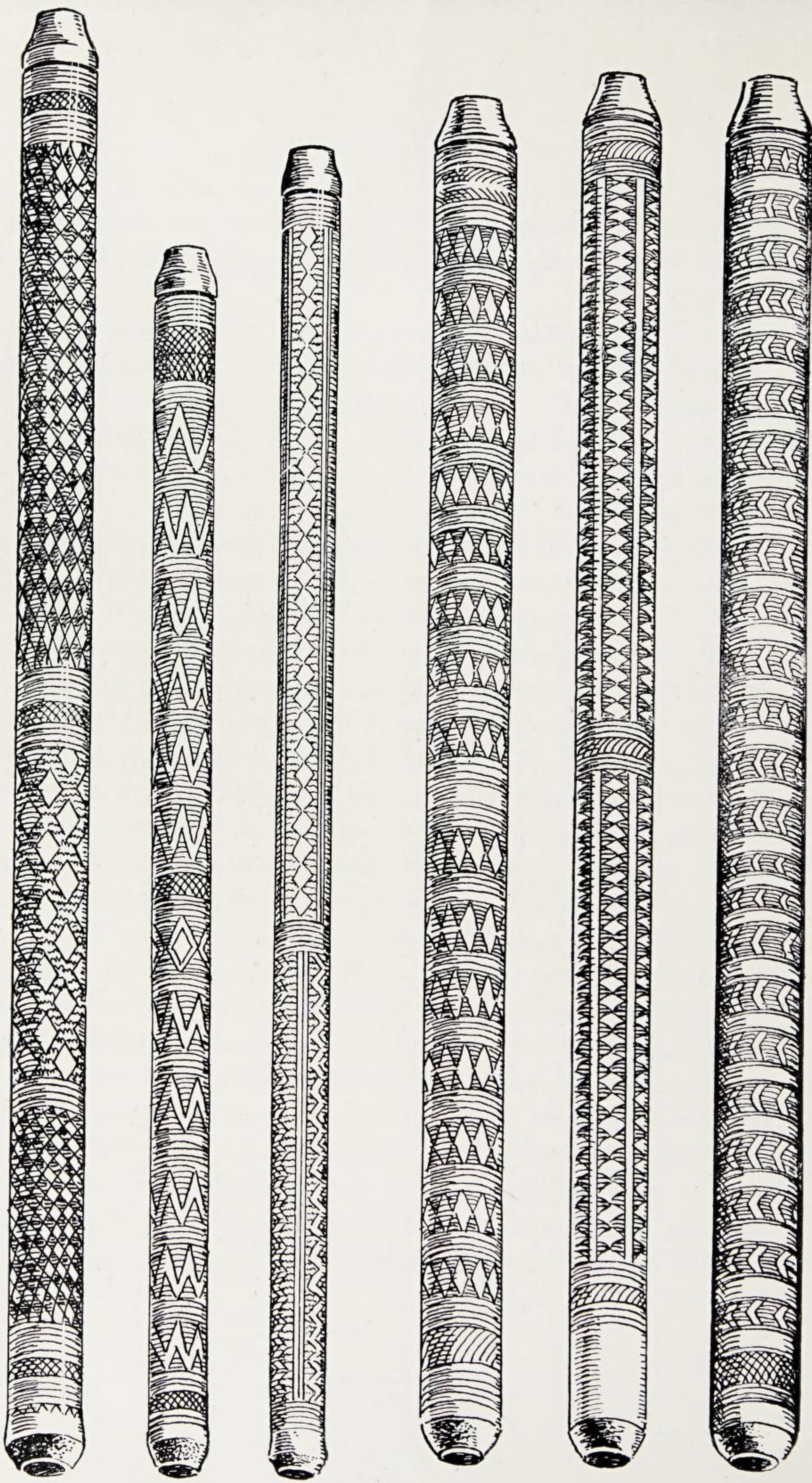


FIG. 65. *Kuttia Kond tobacco-tubes, of decorated bamboo, from the Gumma Mutta, Ganjam District, Orissa. Size: slightly reduced.*

Tobacco-cases

Fig. 70 illustrates one of the cases which is believed by the Murias to be aphrodisiac in its effect.

The Kond containers (Figs. 65 and 66) may well have a similar purpose. The motifs here are simpler and more monotonous, dominated by the angular lozenge theme, which appears to be absent in Bastar. The lozenges are arranged in many different ways; they are sometimes enhanced, more often plain, and the intervening triangles are hatched horizontally. In two examples, there is a design of simple chevrons divided by plain bands on a hatched background.

The angular lozenge is throughout Middle India a conventional symbol for the vulva; I have found it in this sense in the Muria dormitories, in the Bastar forests, in a Bondo sacred grove. It is likely, therefore, that the patterns on the Kond cases have an aphrodisiac purpose.

It should be noted that except in bands at the top and bottom, the hatching on the Kond cases is always

FIG. 66. *Kuttia Kond tobacco-tubes, of decorated bamboo, from villages in the Belgarh Mutta, Ganjam District, Orissa. Length of longer tube,* $9\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

single and horizontal; on the Muria cases it is generally diagonal.

The Kond cases are made from a single node of bamboo and ornamented with the fine point of a knife. The pattern is made to stand out sharply by being rubbed over with oil and ash. The tubes are carried by both men and women in the waist-band or loin-cloth, and they are highly treasured.

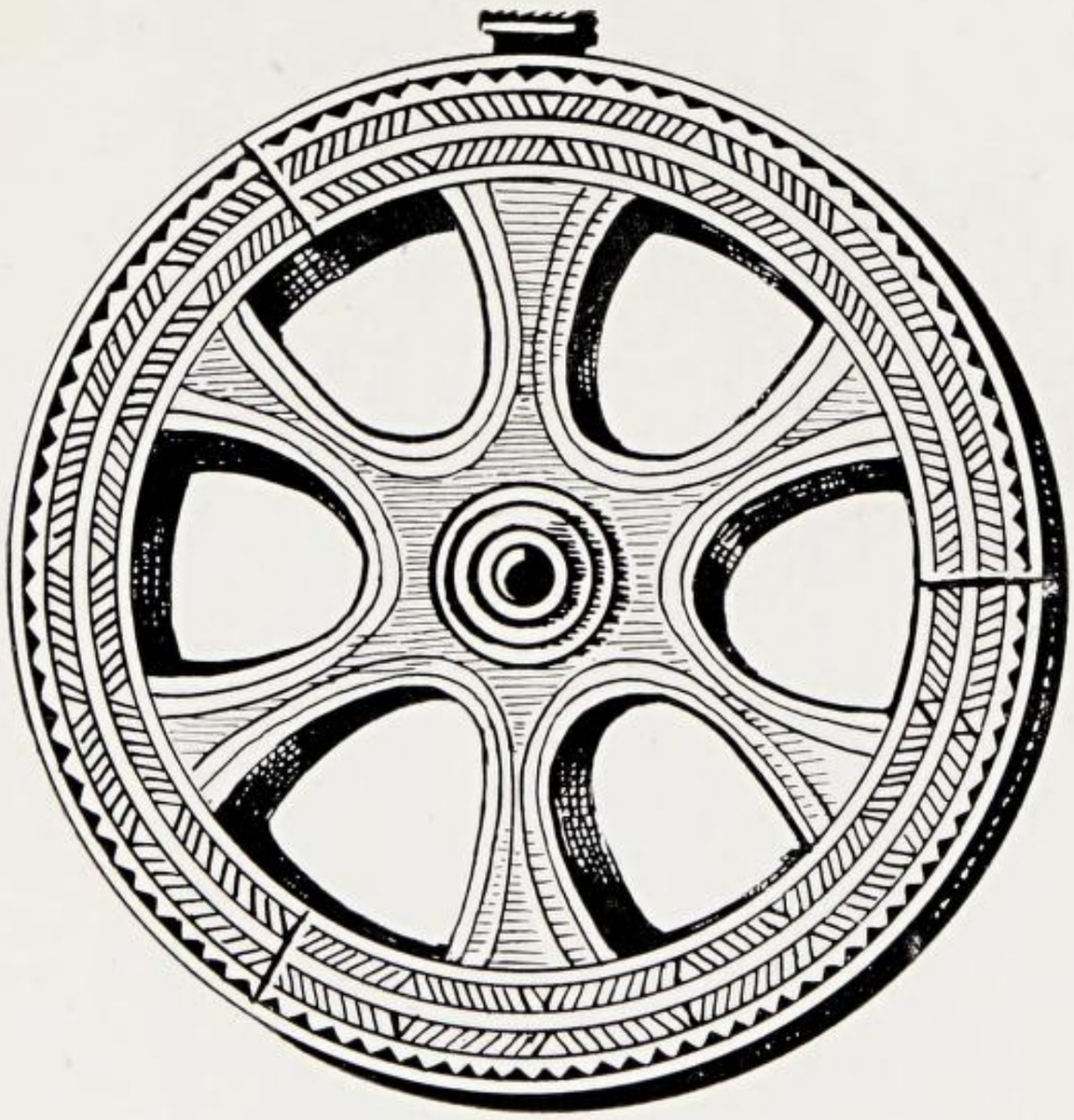


FIG. 67. *Muria tobacco-case in the shape of a wheel. Bastar. Diameter,* $4\frac{1}{4}$ *inches.*

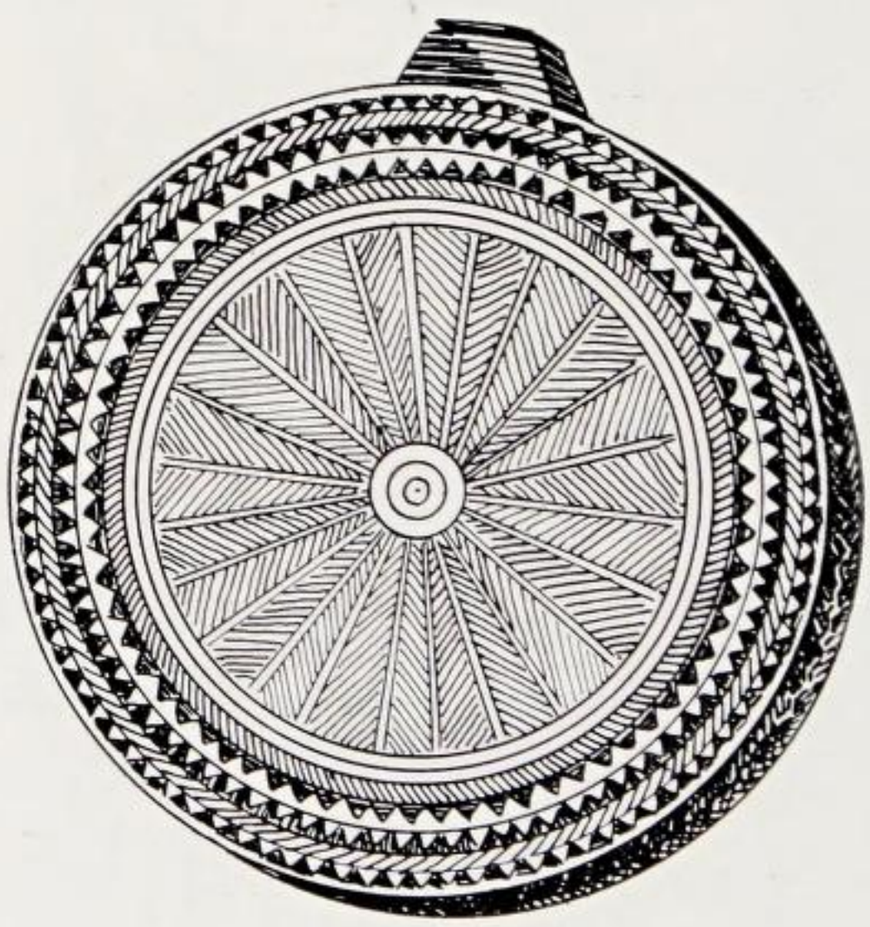


FIG. 68. *Muria tobacco-case supposed to represent a tortoise. Height,* 4 *inches.*

FIG. 69. *Muria tobacco-case supposed to represent a mango. Bastar. Height, 2¼ inches.*

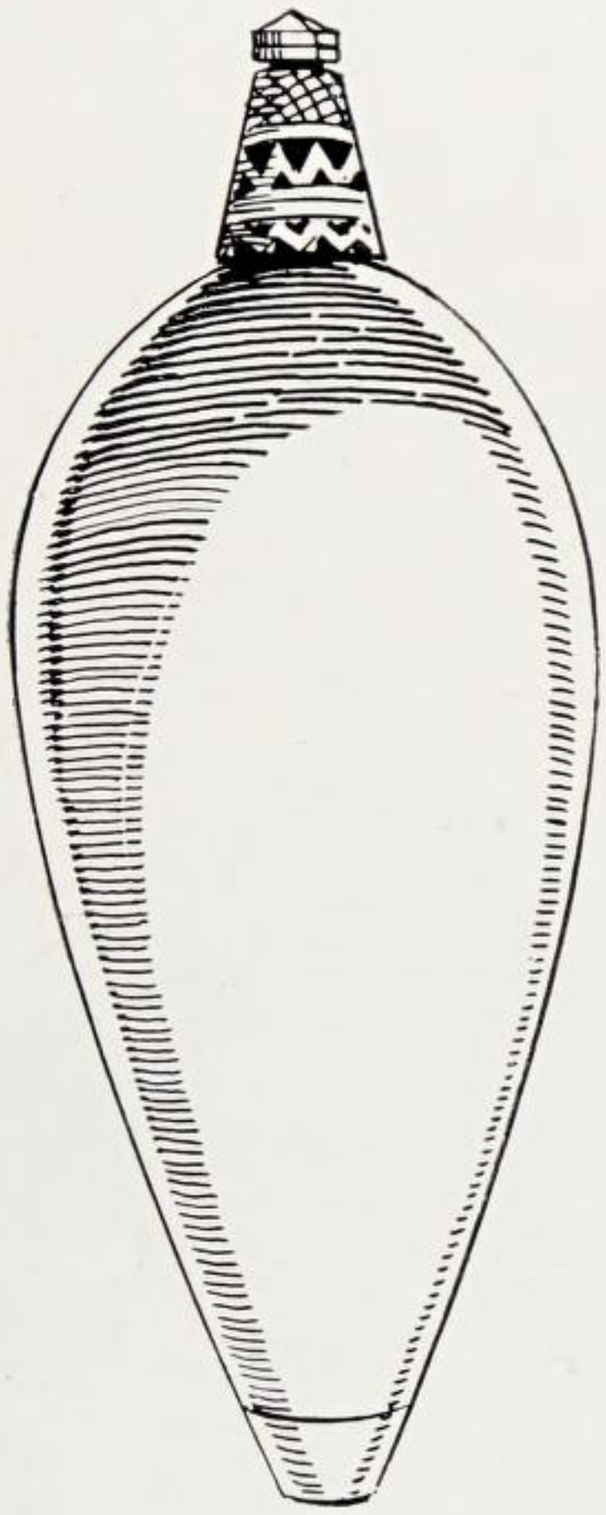


FIG. 70. *Muria tobacco-case with decorative motif of a girl's nipples. Actual size.*

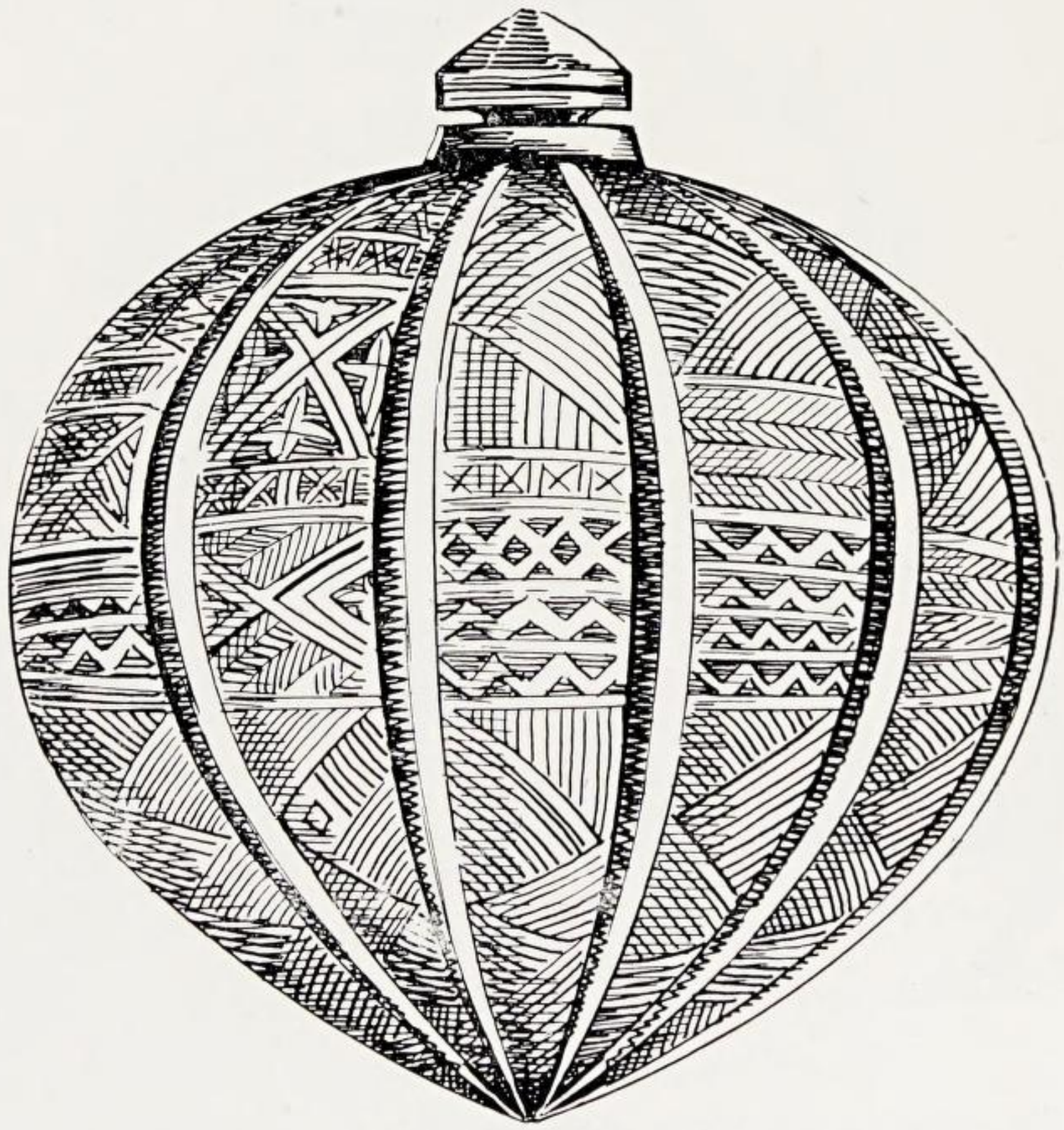


FIG. 71. *Muria tobacco-case from Nayanar, Bastar. Actual size.*

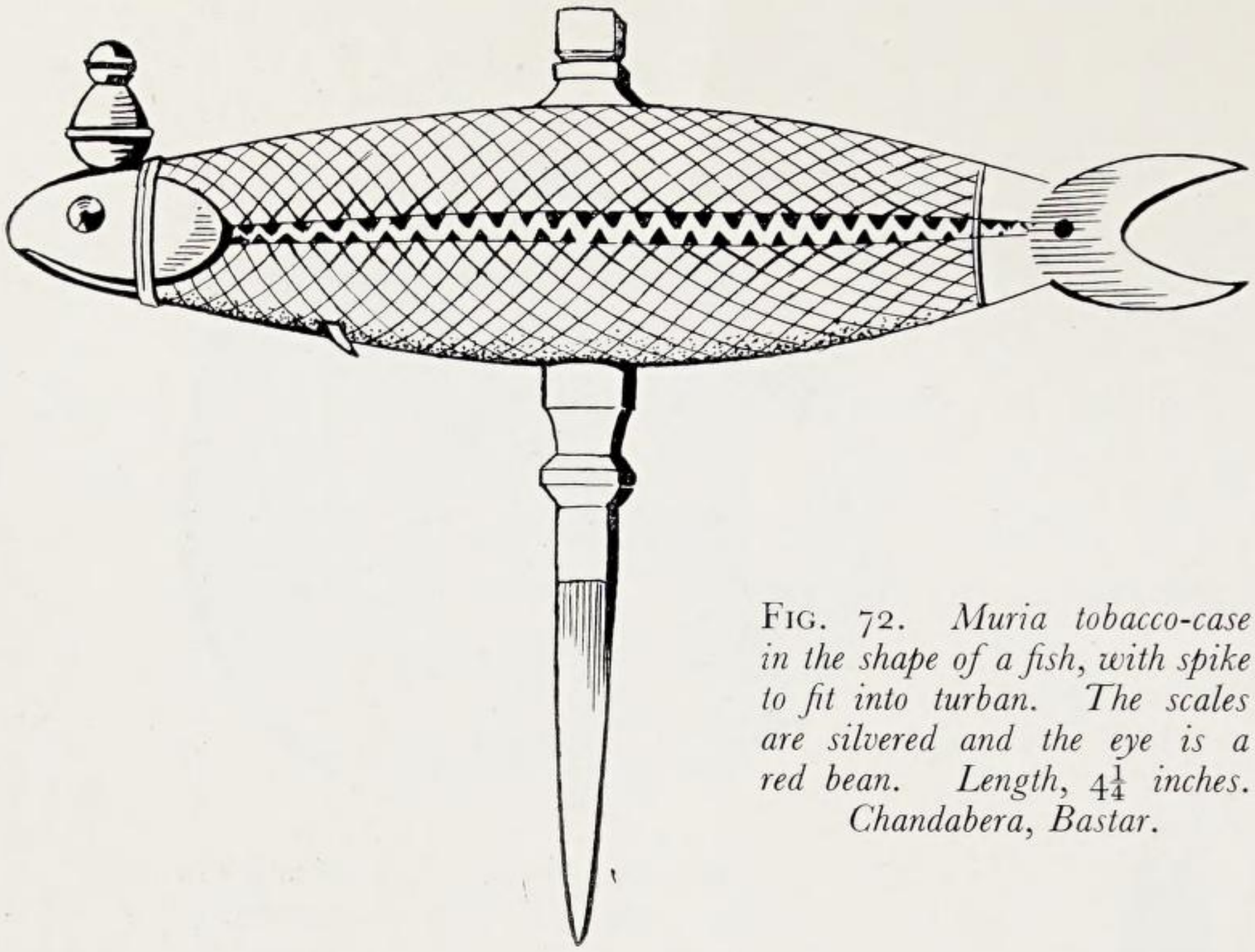


FIG. 72. *Muria tobacco-case in the shape of a fish, with spike to fit into turban. The scales are silvered and the eye is a red bean. Length, 4¼ inches. Chandabera, Bastar.*

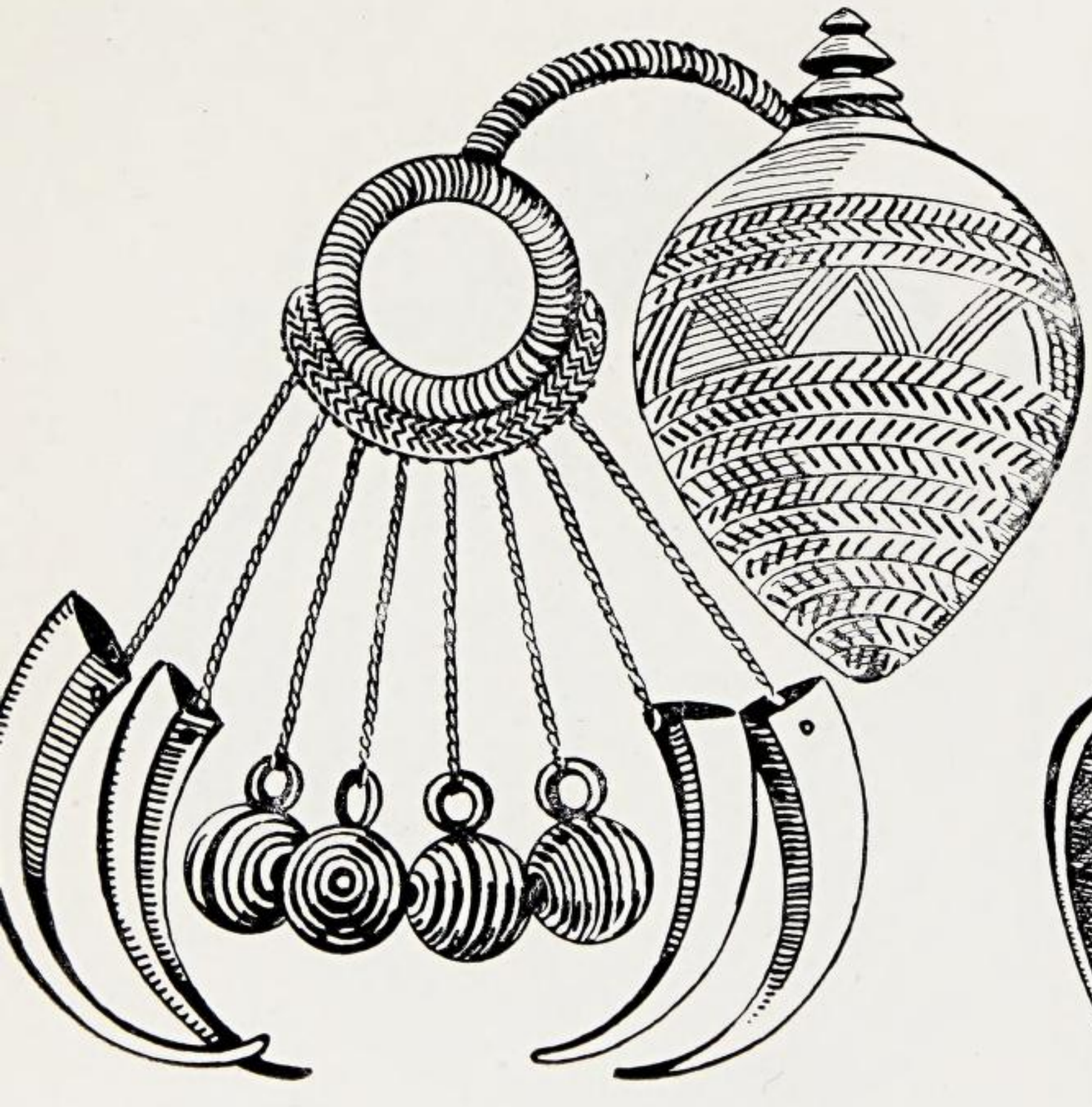
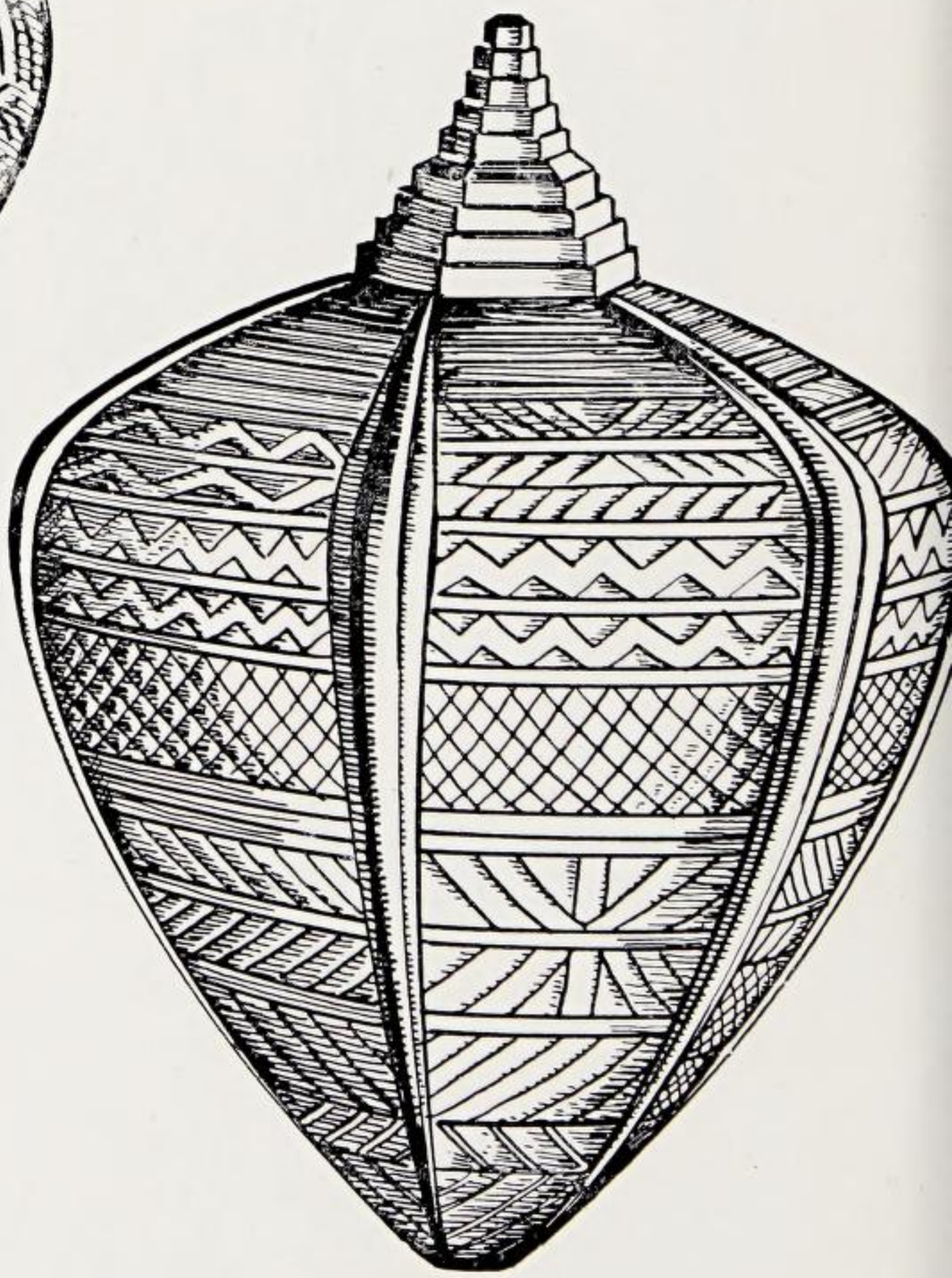


FIG. 73. *Muria tobacco-case with bells and tushes as decoration. Height of case, 3½ inches.*

FIG. 74. *Muria tobacco-case from Markabera, Narayanpur Tahsil, Bastar. Height, 2¾ inches.*



VIII

Art and the Wedding

THE ORISSA TRIBES, like the Hill Marias of Bastar, are still at the stage where an exchange of presents and a good meal makes a marriage; there is small opportunity for artistic expression there. But in Bihar and the Central Provinces the aboriginals have adopted part of the elaborate matrimonial apparatus of Hinduism; they now have some sort of medium and they can work at it. Thus most tribes now erect a booth with a roof of leafy branches; beneath it is a platform on which they draw patterns; they put up a wooden pillar, with lamps and pitchers, round which the bride and groom perambulate; they decorate the couple with crowns. These things give the tribal artists a chance.

In a typical aboriginal marriage of the Central Provinces attention is mainly centred on the booth and the arrangement of symbolic objects within it. One or two wooden pillars, adapted from the Hindu sacred pole, are made; these are usually plain or roughly carved with geometric patterns (opposed triangles are common), but occasionally they are constructed more elaborately. The posts illustrated in Figs. 76 and 78 were made by a Gond of Mandla District, the impetus to do so coming to him in a dream when he was visited by Mahadeo, the modern version of the old Bara Pen. The posts celebrate the legendary marriage of Ahibarran and Bai Basanta (who probably stand for heaven and earth) when, it is said, a similar post was carved by Mahadeo himself. Each post represents a palace of many stories; each hole is a window, and in the attic at the top sits the bridegroom. The craftsman makes a regular thing of these pillars, charging a cow or at least a plump calf for each, and the Gonds like to have them, for they are auspicious and make them look important. The usual

rites attend the making—offerings of coconut and liquor at the beginning and again when the pillar is erected in the booth.

In this case the pillar serves also as a lampstand, the lights of the mythical palace illuminating the modern wedding. More commonly a more or less elaborate lampstand of iron is placed beside the pillar. The lamp frequently appears in Indian painting and poetry as a love-symbol; the wick, the oil, the bowl are all appropriate.

A Mukarni-riddle of the Urdu poet Khusran identifies the lamp and the bridegroom.

> He passed a sleepless night with me;
> But he left me in the morning;
> His separation breaks my heart;
> Is it the bridegroom? No, friend, the lamp.

In a similar mood the Baiga dancer sings,

> Every house
> Must have a niche
> Where the lamp can light its gloom.
> Without a girl
> The richest house
> Is dark.

Fig. 75 shows a Muria and Fig. 79 a rather more elaborate Gadaba lampstand. In the Agaria area, these stands should be made of the sacred virgin iron, the first extracted from a new furnace, or should at least contain some of it. Fig. 80 shows a stand made for a Gond family in an Agaria forge. In these stands, it will be noted, the sexual symbolism is reinforced by the decoration—the stags with upright horns and the erect hoods of cobras.

The *kalsa*-pitchers, which are placed with the post and stand in the centre of the booth,

FIG. 75. *Iron lampstand made by local Lohar blacksmith for use in a Muria marriage ceremony. Baghbera, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar. Height,* 60 *inches.*

are often decorated with grains of rice variously coloured: this seems to be the only attempt at decorating pottery made by the aboriginals. The patterns round the mud platform which is built up about the central pole are almost certainly 'witch-baffling', though people are rather inarticulate about explaining their purpose.

Crowns are now worn almost everywhere at weddings in the Central Provinces and northern Bastar. The Murias make them of date-palm leaves (Fig. 82) and wear them so that they entirely cover the face. The Gonds and other tribes to the north prefer them on the top of the head, tied round with a turban as base; nowadays they are made for them by Dhimars and Ahirs. Bits of coloured paper are added and Hindu bazaar fashions are generally followed (Fig. 86). The purpose of the crown is partly to avert hostile magical forces at a critical time and partly to celebrate the fact that bride and groom are 'Raja and Rani for two-and-a-half days'. As usual, the twin inspiration of so much aboriginal art—magic and snobbery—can be discerned.

For purposes of matrimonial transport, the Baigas and Agarias construct an ingenious elephant, as amusing and picturesque as any in a circus. In view

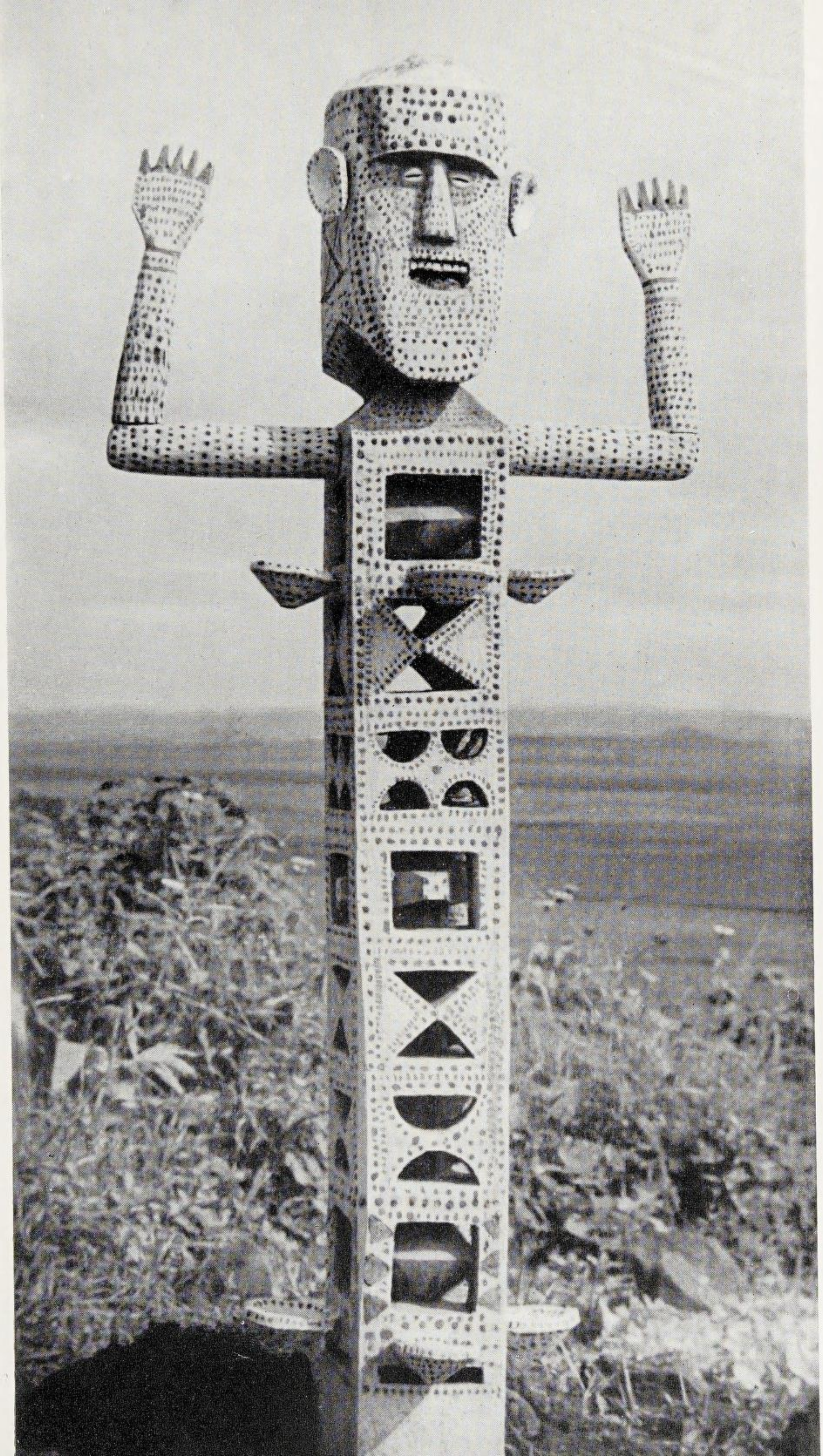
FIG. 76. *Marriage-post of semi-anthropomorphic pattern, carved by a Gond, Surajballi, of Tikaitola, Mandla District, C.P. It is made of* Boswellia serrata *wood, coloured red, white and black, with a paper-covered tin hat. It stands* 56 *inches above ground and the mouth, into which scraps of coconut are put during a wedding, is* $2\frac{1}{4}$ *inches deep.*

FIG. 77. *Detail of Santal marriage-litter.*

of the amount of moving to and fro involved in any marriage, especially in an Orissa marriage, it is remarkable that there has not arisen a fully developed art of the marriage-litter. The only place, however, where I have found it is among the Santals of the Santal Parganas.

The Santal litter is called a *rahi* and is made by tribal craftsmen themselves. Like other productions of the same kind, it is treated with a certain amount of ceremony. When work on it is started, two pigeons are sacrificed; when it is completed, the owner (who is not necessarily the maker) and his wife sit in it and are carried to the central Manjhithan where more pigeons or a goat are offered. The custom is for a prosperous, or enterprising, Santal to engage a craftsman to make the *rahi* for him. He has to provide the wood, and food during the time of manufacture; I heard of one who then paid twenty-two rupees, of another who gave a calf —surprisingly cheap for the beautiful and elaborate work that had been done. To get a *rahi* made is probably a good investment, for the owner can hire it out for so much a time, and people wanting a royal wedding are always ready to pay the price.

FIG. 78. OPPOSITE. *Gond marriage-post from Mandla, with red and blue dots on a white ground, glass teeth and cowrie eyes. The wood is* Shorea robusta *and the post stands* 60 *inches above ground.*



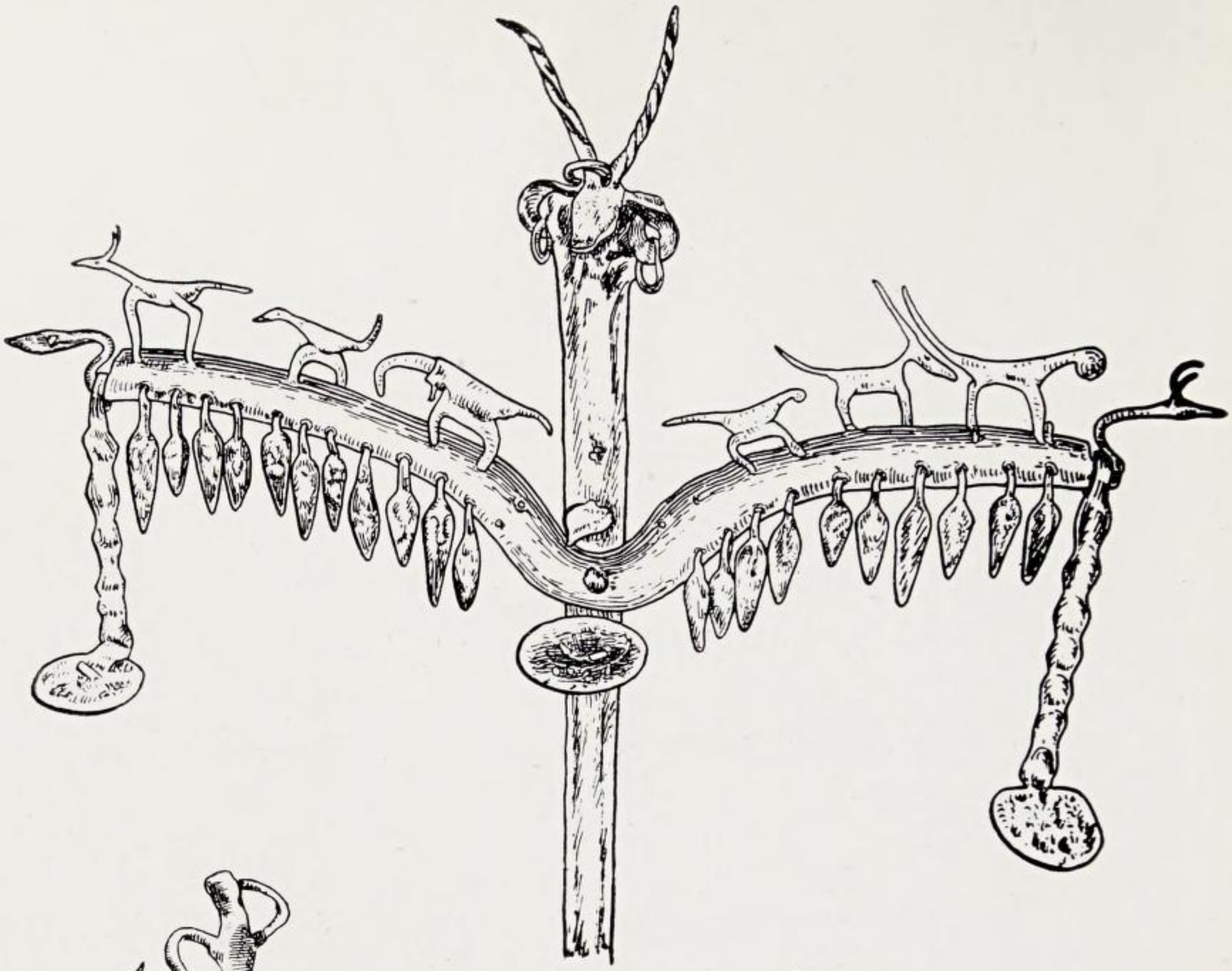


FIG. 79

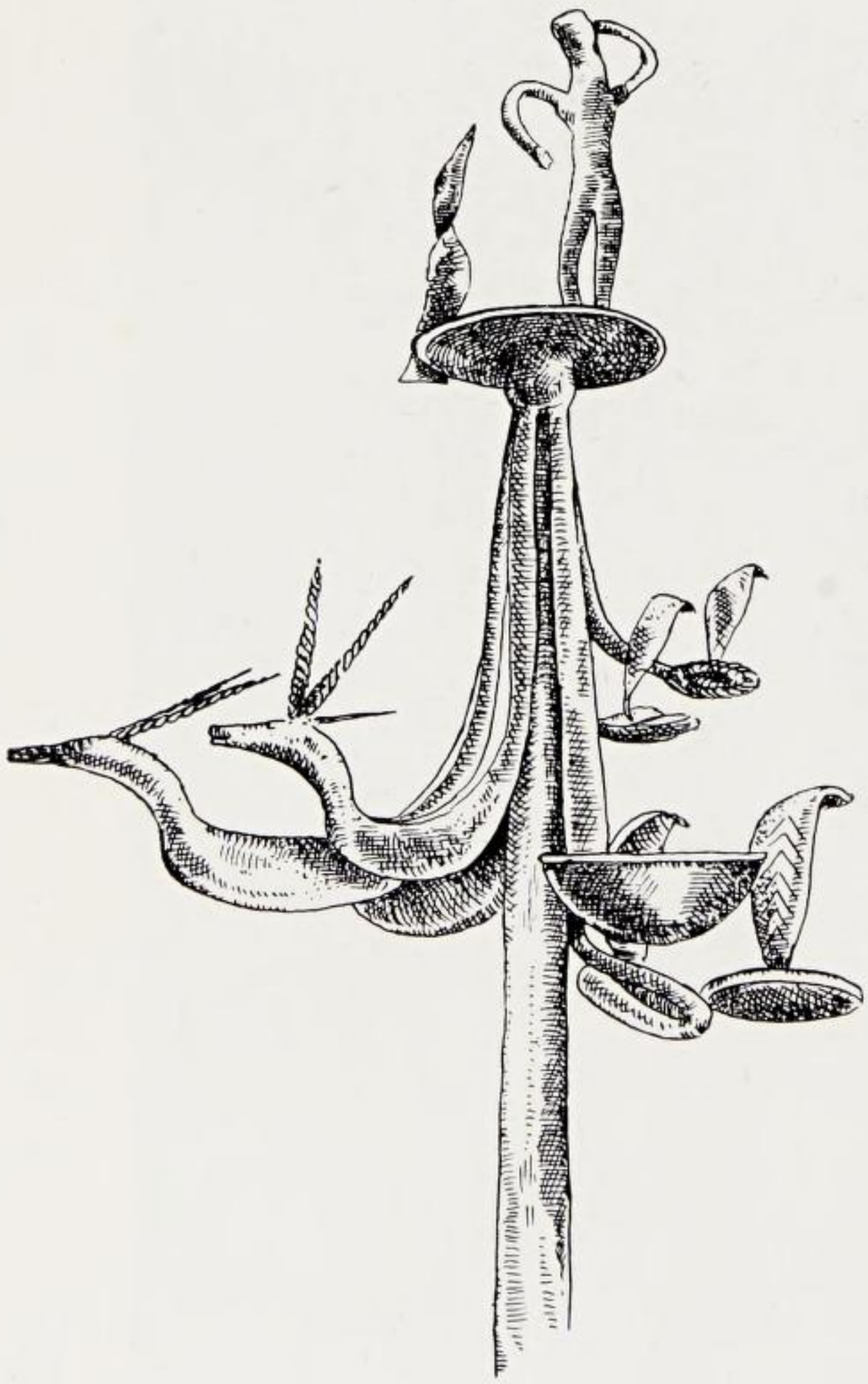


FIG. 80

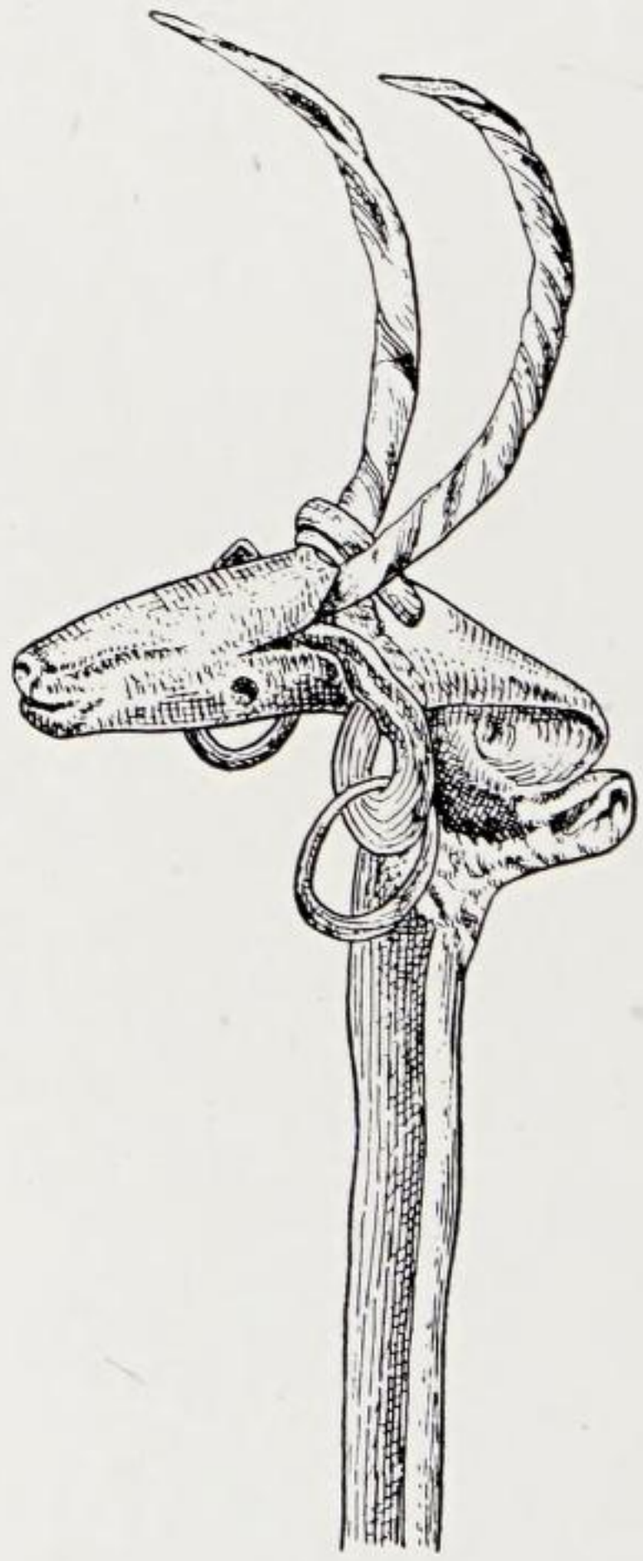


FIG. 81

FIG. 79. *Iron lampstand, for use at weddings or other ceremonial occasions, made for a Gadaba of Kajriput, Koraput District, Orissa, by an aboriginal Kommar blacksmith* (*detail*, FIG. 81).

FIG. 80. *Iron lampstand made by an Agaria of Umaria, Mandla District, C.P., for use in a Gond marriage ceremony. Complete height, 3 feet 5 inches.*

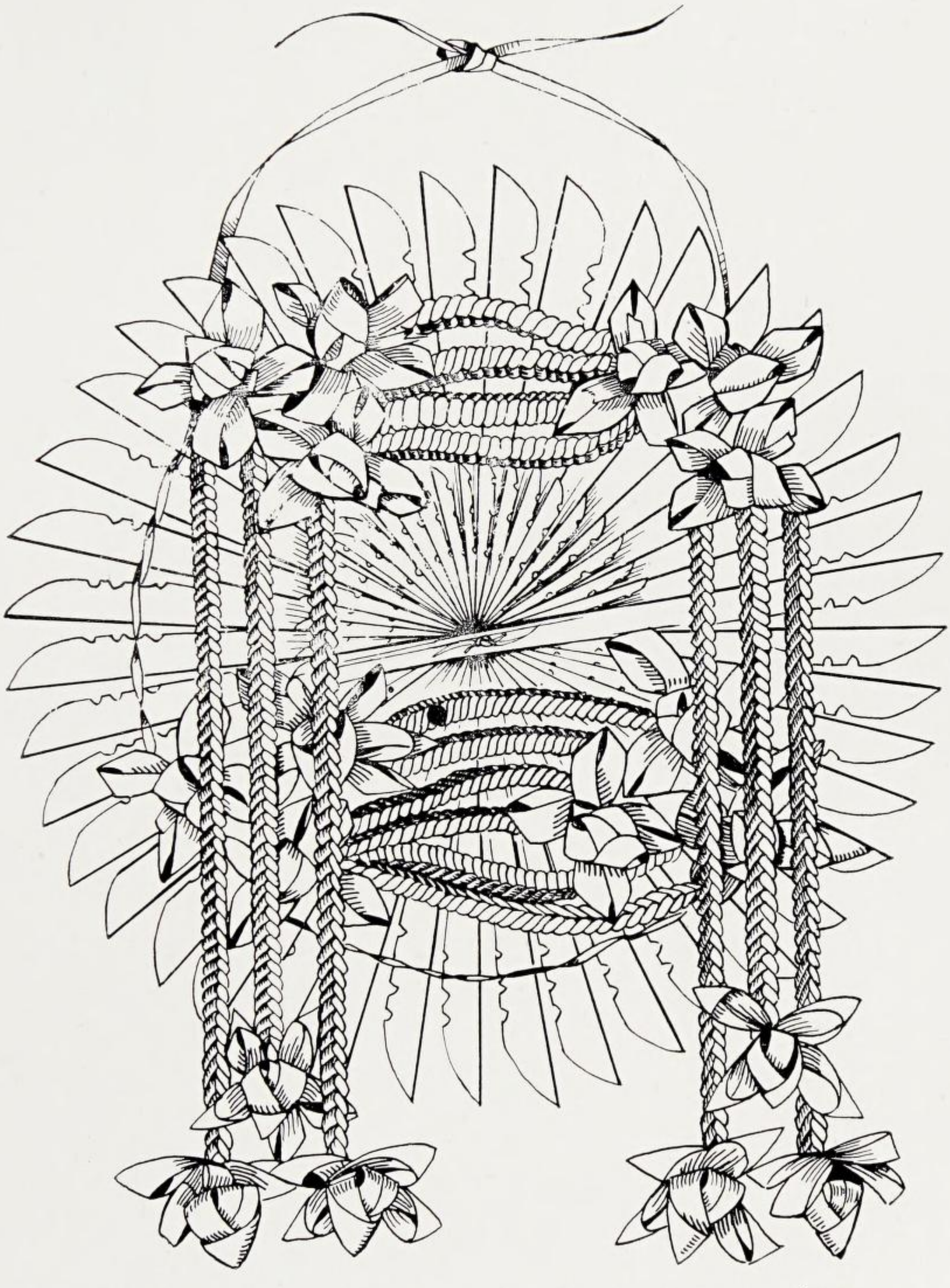


FIG. 82. *Muria marriage-crown made of date-palm leaves and worn by the bridegroom. The bride's crown is smaller. Breadth,* 12 *inches. Sidhawand, Bastar.*

FIG. 83

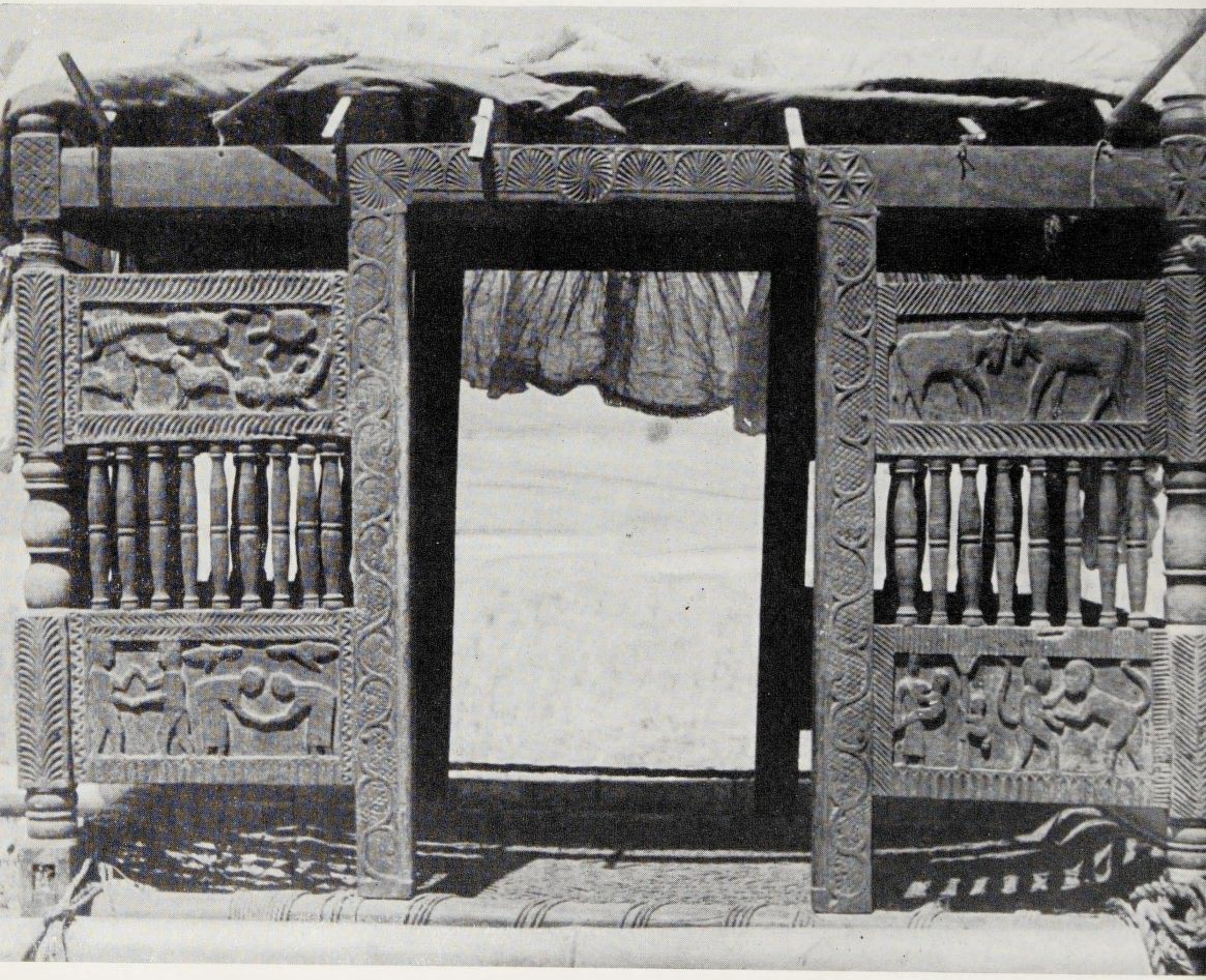


FIG. 84. *Santal marriage-litter* (rahi) *from Kadwa, Santal Parganas, Bihar* (*detail,* FIG. 83).

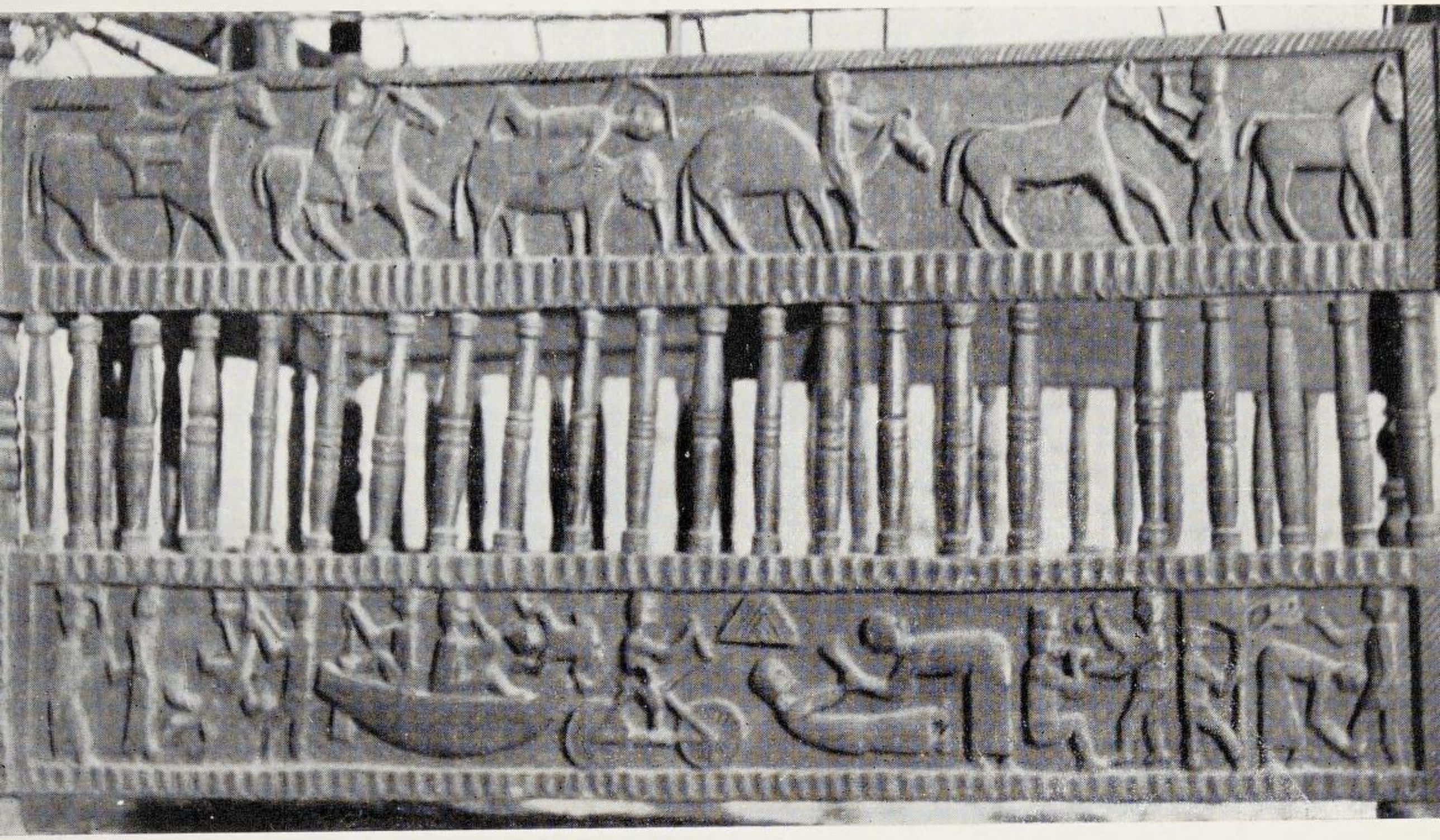


FIG. 85. *Detail of another Santal marriage-litter.*

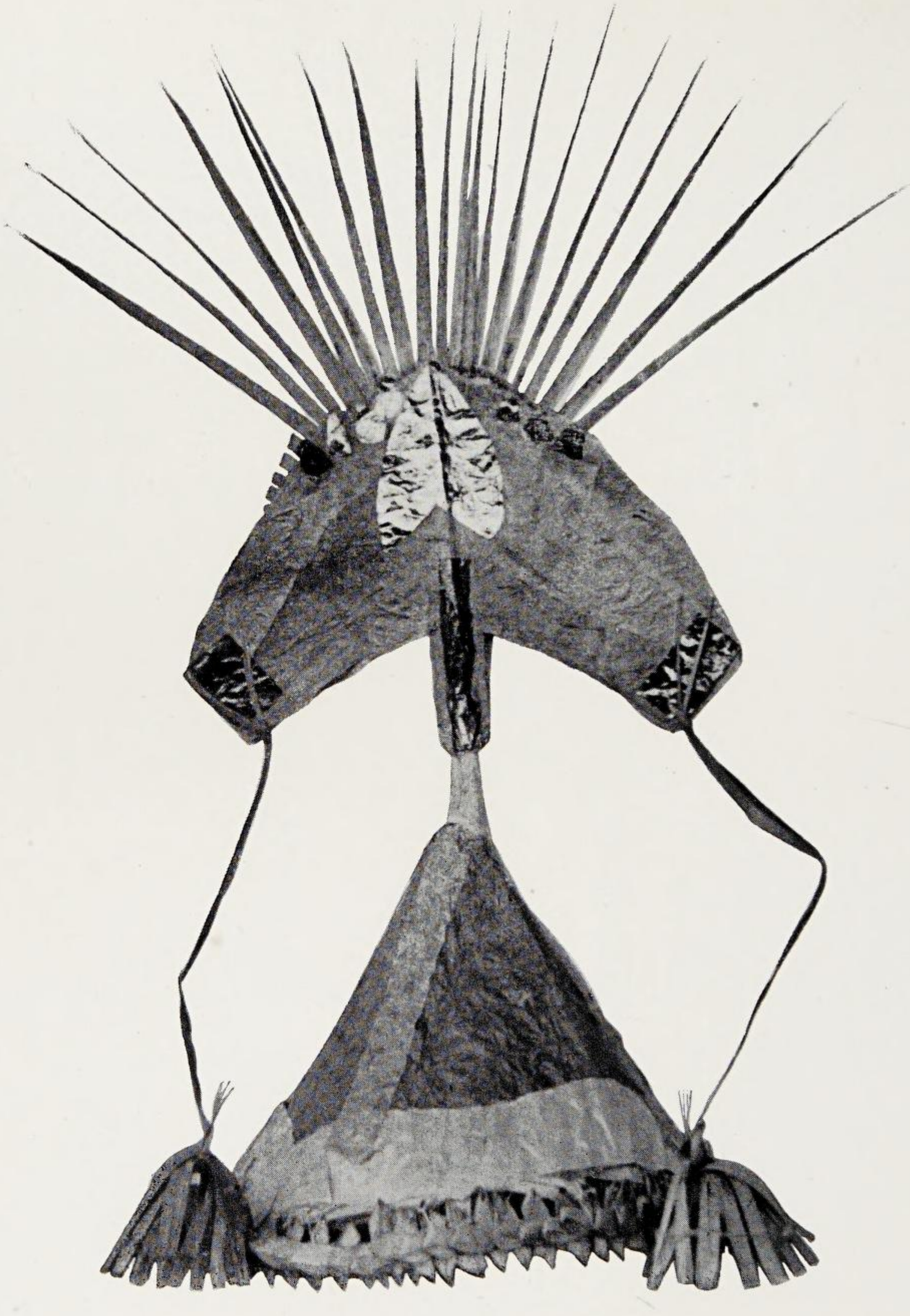


FIG. 86. *Marriage-crown made of palm-leaf and coloured paper by a Dhimar for a Gond bridegroom. Sanhrwachhapar, Mandla District, C.P.*

IX

Fantasy

THE ABORIGINALS' LOVE of the fantastic and bizarre receives illustration throughout this book. Here are a few further examples which are not readily classified elsewhere.

The Kond attraction for the grotesque is revealed in some of their wall-paintings, their masks, and in such creations as the dummy illustrated in Fig. 88. I took this photograph at Surangbaro in 1946 at the festival of the Mahua Harvest, when the precious fruit of the *Bassia latifolia* was eaten for the first time in the year. During the celebrations, which lasted for three days, the boys and girls of the dormitories celebrated their ceremonial friendships with each other; they danced all day and most of the night and, when they wearied, a youth came out with a tall wooden frame over his shoulders and completely covered with red and white cloth. The general effect was most impressive.

The Saoras are fond of making distorted carvings, examples of which are given in Figs. 89, 90 and 91. These seem to have some sexual significance, for the fish is a common fertility symbol: Fig. 89 shows a man approaching a woman.

The fantastic Anga Pen (Fig. 92), the clan-god of Murias, Marias, Jhari Telengas and Halbas in Bastar and of allied tribes in Kanker and the southern Central Provinces, is thought of as a person who can marry, have children and enter into various human relationships. But there is nothing anthropomorphic about its image, which is that of a bird or perhaps a cobra with raised head. Across three parallel poles of wood are tied pieces of bamboo. The central pole, which is given the bird or snake head, is the actual god; the side-poles are to enable his bearers to carry him about. Tufts of peacock-feathers are attached

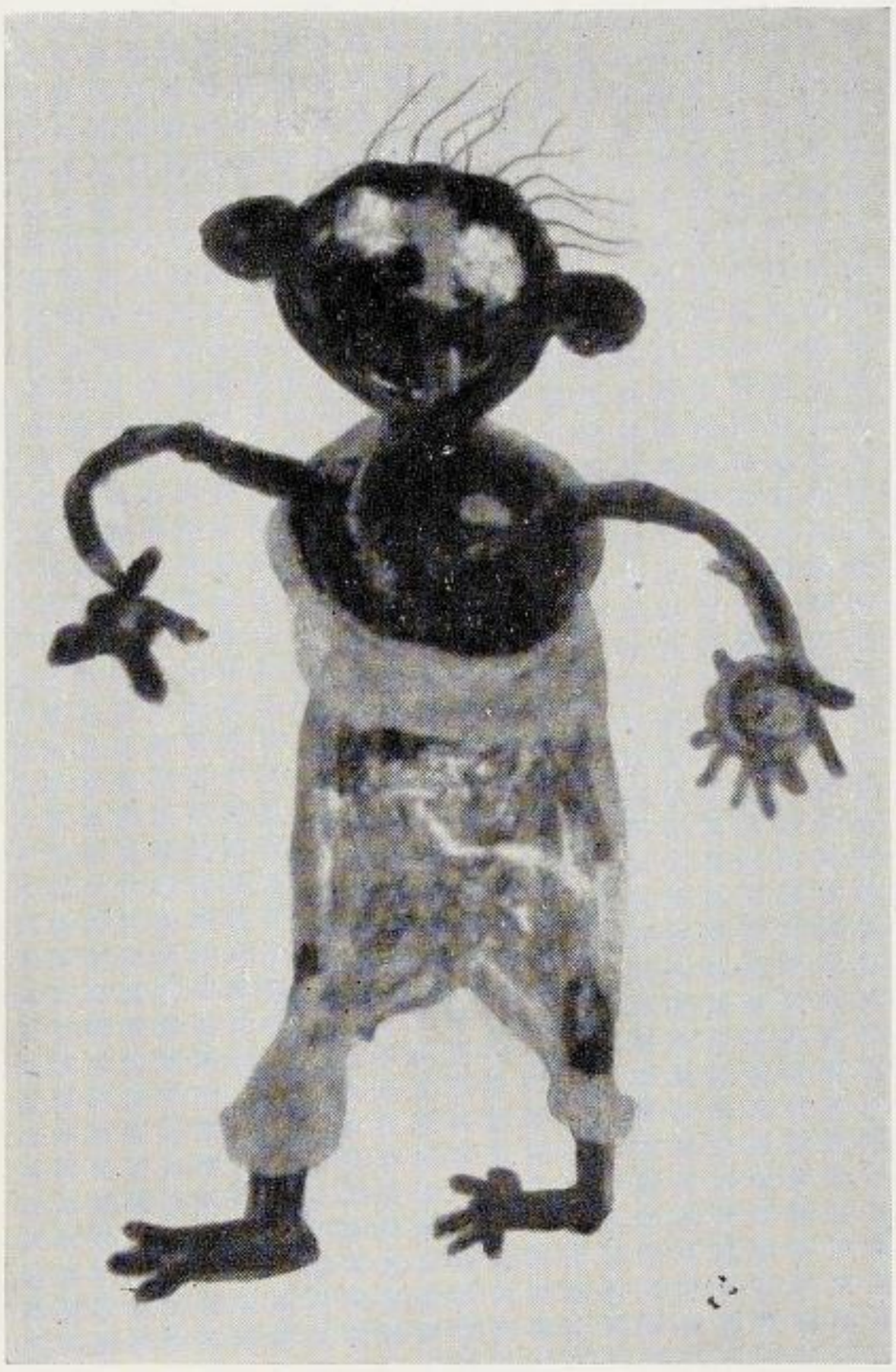


FIG. 87. *Gond representation of demons, painted in red and black on the white walls of a house in Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P.*

to the junctions of the poles and cross-bars. Silver ornaments, symbols of the sun and moon and sometimes just ordinary rupee coins, are nailed to the ends of the poles and bands of silver are hammered round them. Bells are hung round the 'neck'. The Anga's soul, a piece of iron wrapped in straw, may be placed on the frame. The appearance of this strange god is very striking and its effect is heightened by the atmosphere of awe and excitement which marks its public appearances. It is supposed to have the power of directing the movements of the men who carry it, and guides them now to dance, now to demand food or liquor, now to unmask a witch or thief, for whose detection its services are often engaged.

Another fantastic object connected with Muria religion is the wooden horse (Fig. 94). The festal dances of the western Murias have developed from those of the Hill Marias, who have a custom that every male performer must carry something over his shoulder; this is usually a large-bladed battle-axe, but it may be a stick, an umbrella, or a sword. Out of this custom the Murias have elaborated a remarkable object called a *kokti*. This is a piece of curved wood or root which is chosen because of its rough resemblance to a horse's head; often a fringe of small roots is left on the upper side to suggest a mane. The 'horse' is given ears made of pointed bits of wood, horns of the barking deer, or tusks of a wild boar. From the nose hang streamers of white feathers and the nose itself is often decorated with criss-cross

FIG. 88. *Dummy used to enliven Pangia Kond festivals and dances at Surangbaro, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, about* 10 *feet.*

FIG. 89. *Saora wood-carving from Sukulipada, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 90. *Saora wood-carving of a man and a fish from Dariambo, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

patterns. Into the back of the *kokti* are fixed three or four sticks ornamented with bands of caryota or bamboo and each has a tuft of peacock-feathers at the tip. The general effect, especially when hundreds of youths carrying these sticks appear together at one of the greater festivals, is beautiful and impressive.

The tribesmen only rarely portray scenes or personages from their mythology or folk-lore. The umbilical cord and stump has a curious fascination for them and there are many legends about these grotesque objects; a hero throws his cord across the sky and it turns into the rainbow; long ago women who had enormously exaggerated stumps could use them as weapons or as organs of pleasure. Fig. 93 is a spirited portrayal of Bodrahin, one of these legendary women, who had an umbilical stump so long that it took six handmaidens to carry it. This wall-decoration shows them going along, while a cock sits on the tip of the stump crowing in triumph. Similar motifs, of Hirakhan Kshattri and the ludicrous watchman Maradlangha, are illustrated in Hivale's *The Pardhans of the Upper Narbada Valley*.

FIG. 91. *Saora wood-carving from Sukulipada, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

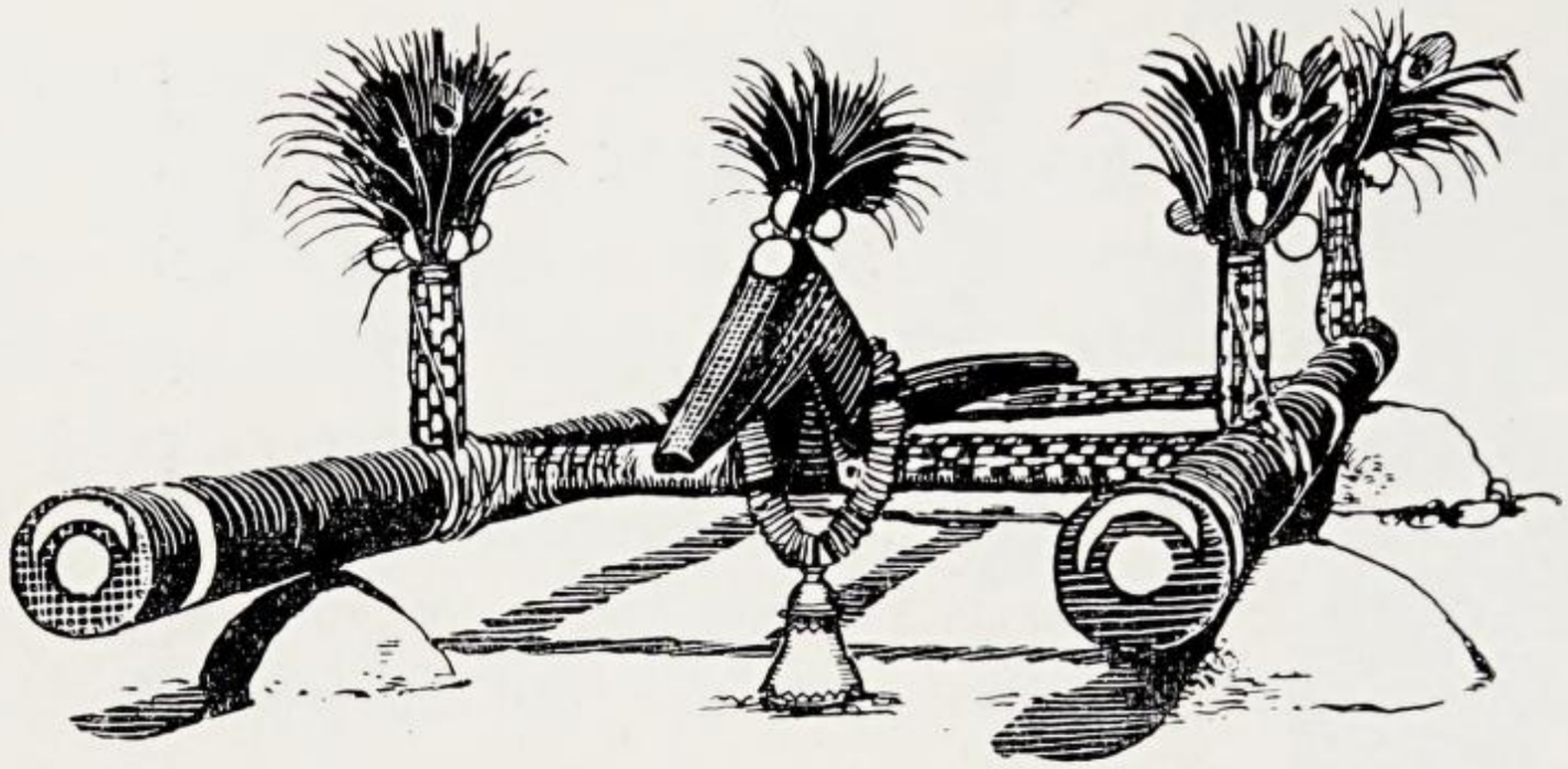


FIG. 92. *The Anga Pen, clan-god of Murias and Marias, anthropomorphically imagined though not so portrayed, common throughout Bastar.*

FIG. 93. *Bodrahin, a fantastic figure of Pardhan mythology, modelled in mud on the wall of a house in Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P. Legends about Bodrahin will be found in the author's* Myths of Middle India, *pp.* 395 *ff.*

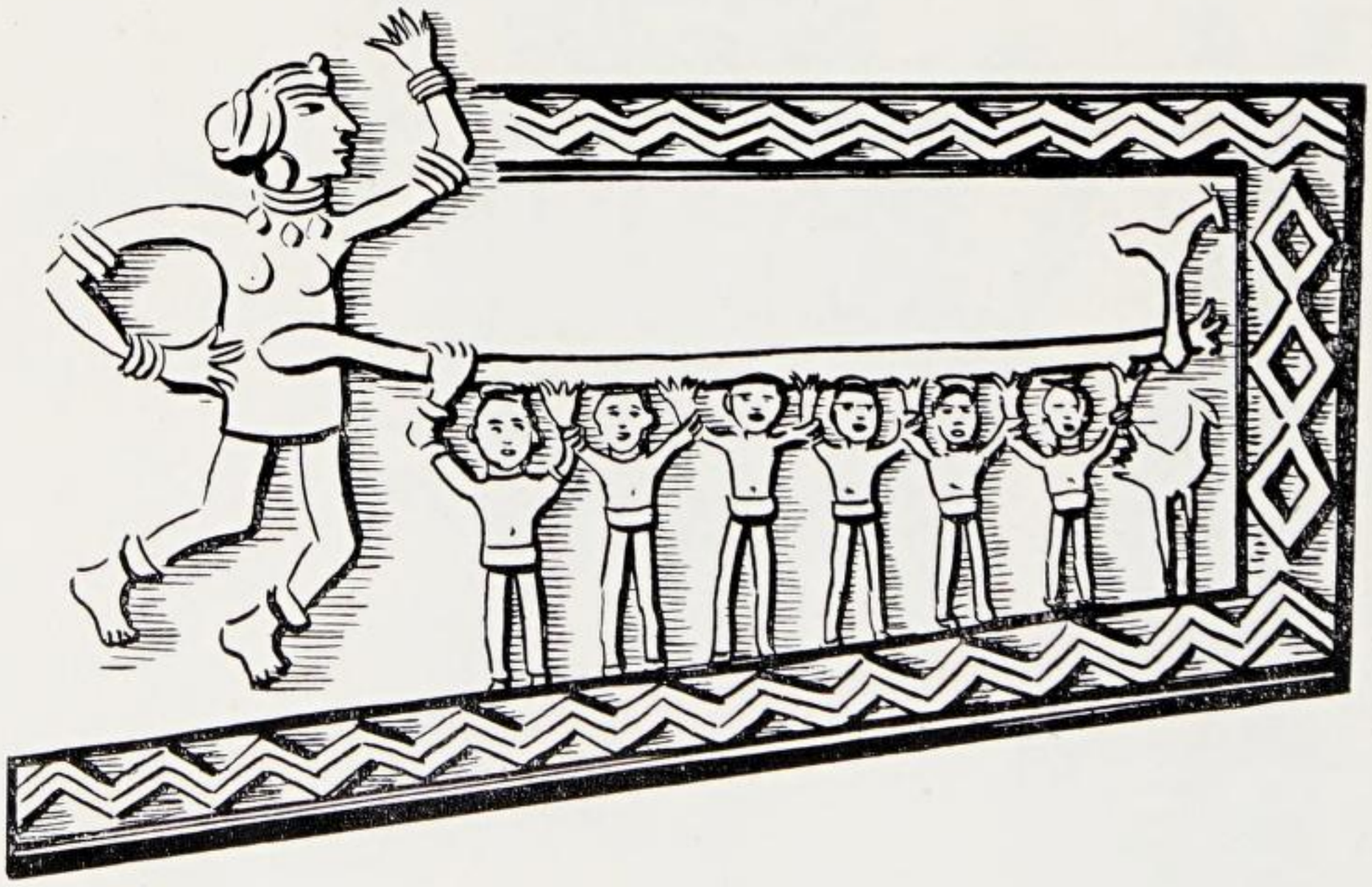


FIG. 94. *Decorated wooden 'horse', with horns of the barking deer, used for ceremonial dances by the Murias of Bastar. Length of wooden pole, 40 inches.*

FIG. 95. *Gond representation of demons, painted in red and black on the white walls of a house in Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P.*

FIG. 96. *Gond representation of demons, painted in red and black on the white walls of a house in Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P.*

X

Funerary Pillars

WOODEN FUNERARY PILLARS are distributed irregularly throughout Middle India; there does not seem to be a necessary connexion with any megalithic cult, for the pillars are sometimes independent of, sometimes associated with, stone menhirs. The Saoras, for example, normally erect stones, sometimes stones of gigantic size, for the Dead: but they may also set up carved pillars (Fig. 97)—these are often due to a failure of rain attributed to the malice of a particular ghost.

Probably the best known of the memorial pillars are the Korku *mundas*, for there is what Forsyth called a 'very populous cemetery' of them near much-visited Pachmarhi. These pillars are erected for the Dead at the Sedoli ceremony, which appears to correspond to the Saora *Karja* and may be for one or several persons. They are made of unblemished teak or *Shorea robusta* wood and are decorated with a carving of the deceased on horseback, weapons in his hand and the sun and moon above. This is the main theme of the memorial, but such symbols as a jungle fowl, a spider and a human ear, may be added (Figs. 99 and 100). D. H. Gordon has suggested that 'at one time the Korkus erected stone memorial pillars of the Virgal type and that the wooden memorials are derived from these, though it is possible that wooden and stone memorials may at one time have co-existed. There are stone pillars both at the memorial shrine near Pachmari and at the Korku village of Tamia: they appear to be ninth or tenth century work'.

Not unlike the Korku posts are the Bhil *gata* monuments, though these are made of stone and are in appearance remarkably similar to European gravestones. They are set up only for important people, including women, and their erection is attended with due ceremony

and a feast. The stones may be carved by Bhils themselves or by members of a Hindu caste. Human beings on horse-back are generally represented, and often the sun and moon appear as 'witnesses'.

In Bastar, the Murias make small undistinguished pillars of wood in those areas where their megalithic culture has disappeared. The Kuruks of the Indravati Valley erect small pillars with the figures of birds carved on the top. It is only the Bison-horn Marias who have elaborated the practice. Even they do not make their own pillars, but get them manufactured by local carpenters under their direction. But the pillars so exactly represent Maria taste and interest, and the carpenters are so 'aboriginal' in all but name, that they must be illustrated here.

The Maria pillars are not substitutes for the stone menhirs, but are erected in association with them; an important man gets his stone to satisfy his uneasy ghost in the other world and his pillar to promote his reputation in this. The pillars are usually erected near a highway where they can be seen by travellers. They are made of the wood of the *Terminalia tomentosa* sacred to the Gonds or the *Shorea robusta* tree almost equally sacred to the Forest Department. They are rather expensive as these things go. For Barse Marka's pillar at Barrem, the dead man's sister's son (who was his son-in-law) gave, at a time when things were comparatively cheap, a fine bull-calf, five rupees worth of cloth, and daily food while the carpenter was working. The pillar took fifteen days to make.

The style of decoration varies greatly; this is not surprising in view of the large area covered by the Bison-horn Marias and the lack of opportunities for

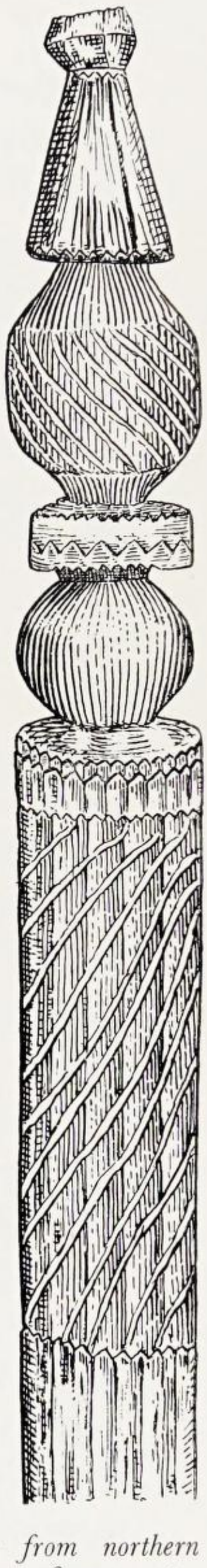


FIG. 97. *Saora wooden pillar from northern Ganjam, erected to appease the ghost of an ancestor which was believed to be interfering with the rainfall. Total height,* 36 *inches.*

intercommunication. One of them, for example, the pillar near Dilmilli (Fig. 101), is heavily decorated with carvings of dancers, animals and fish. The deceased is shown riding an elephant, carrying an umbrella, an axe and bags of money. The Marias, unlike the Bhils who prefer the horse, generally suggest a person's importance by showing him riding on an elephant. Among other themes are men ploughing and others carrying a pot of rice-beer. The carvings are straightforward and realistic, and there is a remarkable absence of geometrical design.

The pillar in memory of Kopa Dhurwa at Massenar (Fig. 134) is not so well carved, but here, too, we have the dead man on his elephant with an umbrella, a gun and his Jubilee Medal. On other sides of the pillar are men dancing in their bison-horn gear, boys and girls dancing with a pot of rice-beer and a youth trying to drag away a girl by the hand. Space is filled in with carvings of crocodiles, porcupine, peacocks, tigers and fish.

A pillar in memory of Marvi Masa who was sentenced to transportation for life for murder is carved with a rather pleasing simplicity. On all four sides Masa is shown sitting on his swing—for he was a well-known shaman. On the south side he holds a trident on his head; on the east side he has a sword in either hand; on the north he is holding a large sacrificial spoon and on the west he is swinging, his long hair flowing behind him.

In most cases the top of the pillar is decorated with birds, tridents and the heads of crocodiles. A pillar at Chingner for an important member of the Lekhami clan was unadorned except for three rows of lozenges cut round near the top and a single wooden pigeon as a finial (Fig. 98). Another pillar, at Bare Arapur, was undecorated save by three pigeons and some red flags.

When first put up the pillars are usually coloured in red and blue with perhaps a white background.

Funerary Pillars

In profusion of ornament and intimate relation to the normal life of the tribe, the Maria pillars resemble the Santal *rahi*-litters.

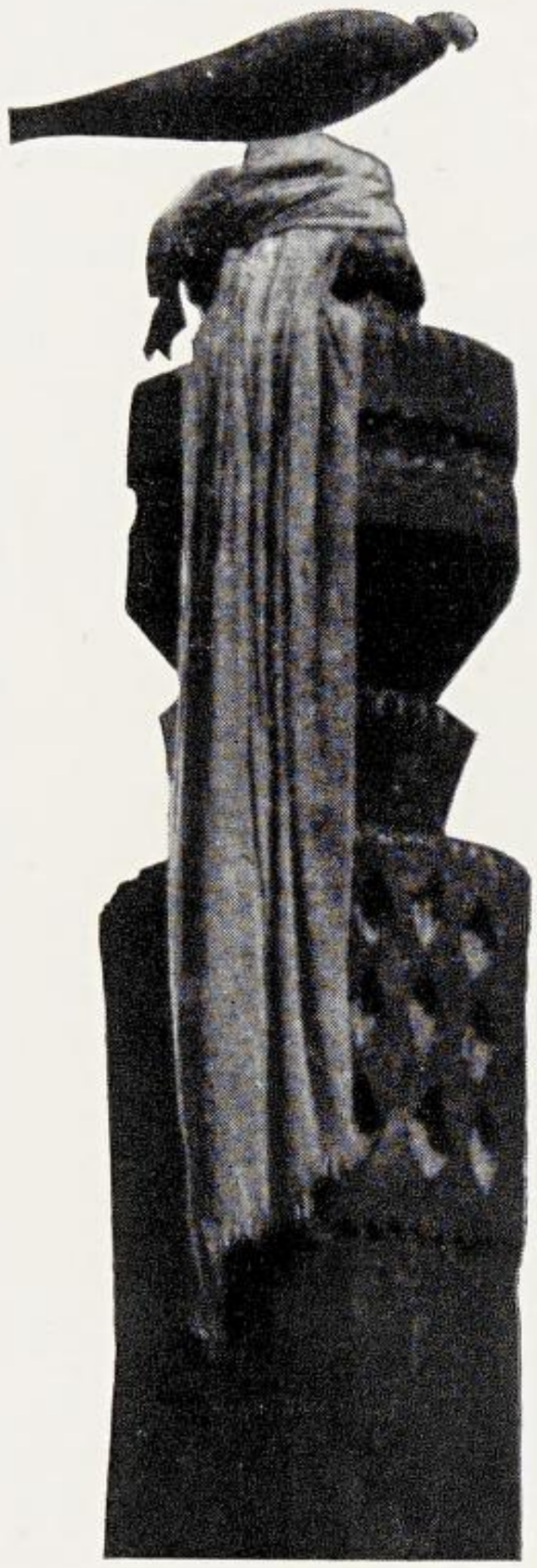
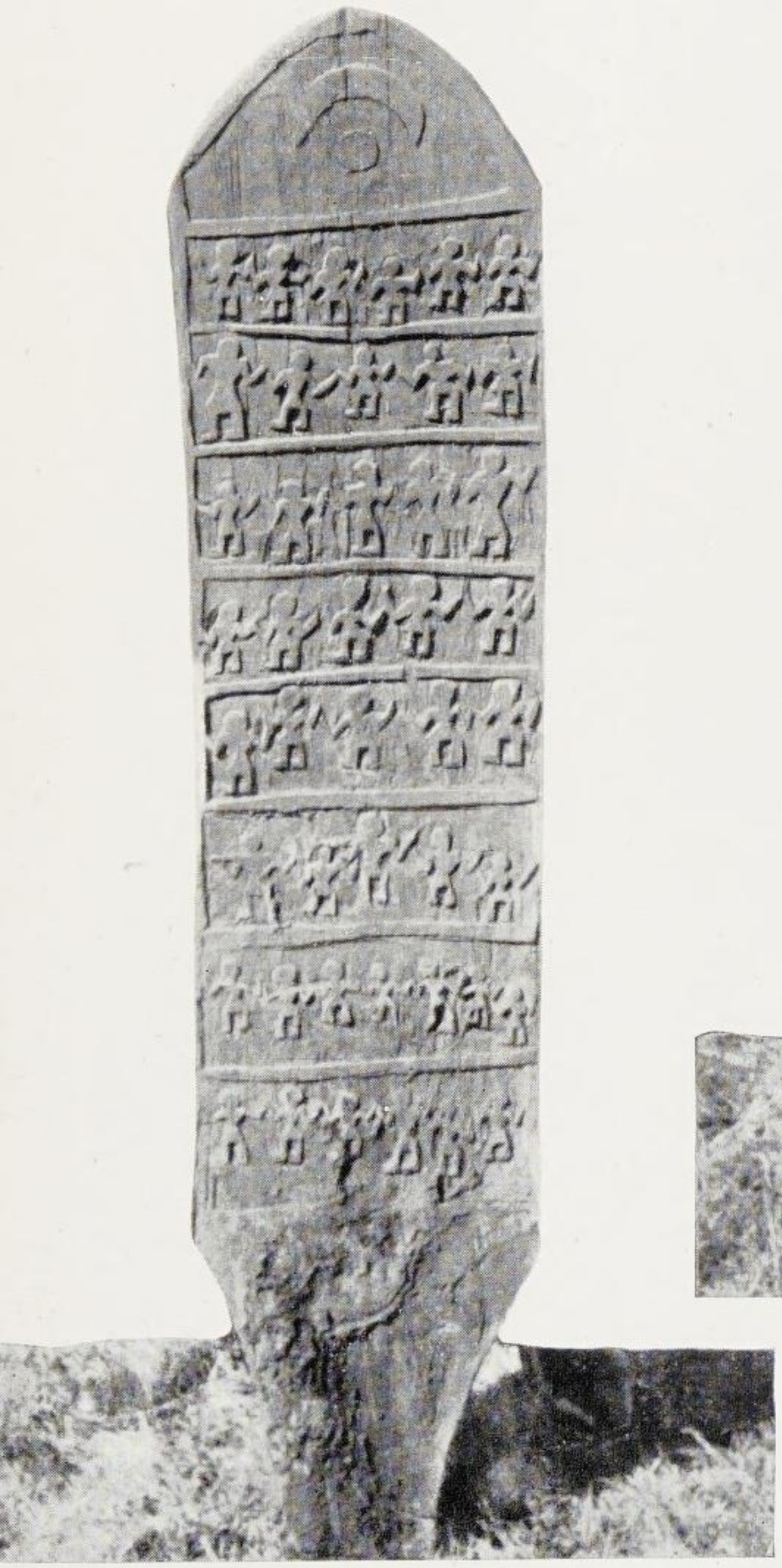


Fig. 98. *Bison-horn Maria pillar at Chingner, Bastar.*

The question finally arises whether these memorials are genuine 'aboriginal' products. We have seen that the Bhil stones may be, and the Maria pillars are, prepared by extra-tribal craftsmen. The Rajputs in Udaipur and elsewhere raise memorials similar to the Bhil *gata*. There is in Bengal a very old Hindu custom of erecting what are called *brisa-kat* (bull-posts) for the dead; they are so named because

a carving of a bull occupies a prominent place upon them. There is also a Siva-phallus at the top and male or female figures carved at the bottom. The general shape of the Bengal posts resembles that of the Korku and Maria memorials and it has been suggested that the latter are adaptations from Hindu models which have since disappeared.

This may well be so. But in considering the life and culture of the modern Indian aboriginal too sharp a line cannot be drawn between him and his Hindu neighbour. His religion is a member of the Hindu family; many of his social customs are the same or similar; his art cannot fail to be influenced by the prevailing culture of the country.



FIGS. 99-100. *Korku memorial tablets carved in teak with traditional representations of horsemen and men dancing, with the sun and moon at the top and generally a chevron pattern down the sides.* (*Photographs by D. H. Gordon.*)

FIG. 101. *Bison-horn Maria funerary pillar of* Terminalia tomentosa *wood at Dilmilli, southern Bastar.*

FIG. 102. *Bison-horn Maria pillar near Chitrakot, Bastar, with detail.*

XI

The Decoration of Walls and Doors

Fig. 103. *Santal carving of sigma on a* banam *fiddle* (Fig. 148).

In spite of the all-pervasive influence of religion on the art of tribal India, there are certain forms of decoration that appear to be largely secular in purpose. One can never, of course, be altogether certain about this sort of thing; a stylized cobra (Fig. 104) modelled in clay on both sides of a door may be declared by the maker to be only decorative, but there may be latent in his mind a memory of the old tradition of the cobra as the guardian of hidden treasure and its position beside a door may therefore have a vaguely protective purpose.

Elsewhere, however, it is rather refreshing to find, in an art so dominated by phobias, some work which seems to have no other purpose than the creation of beauty. Such are the secular wall-decorations of the Gonds and Pardhans in Mandla and the wood-carvings on Gond, Baiga, Santal, Kond, Juang and Saora doors.

The Gond and Pardhan wall-decorations are made with a thick sticky mud or clay worked up with chaff and water; it is a difficult medium and is the speciality of women, some of whom attain considerable proficiency in the art. The patterns and figures are done in high relief while a wall is still being built; the mud of the wall itself, in fact, should be still damp and on no account should it be cowdunged or whitewashed before the patterns are imposed upon it.

The woman artist surveys and plans the area of wall to be decorated and usually begins by making a simple frame right round it. Within

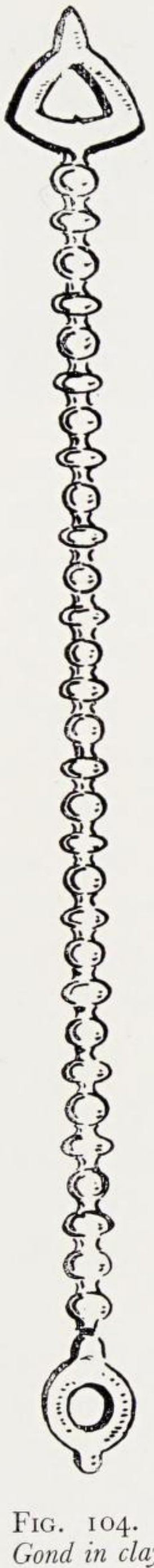


FIG. 104. *Stylized cobra, modelled by a Gond in clay, beside a door in the author's house at Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P.*

this frame she may add one or two others at successively lower levels of relief. These frames are often simple lines or bars, occasionally enhanced with raised scrolls or incised chevrons or bone patterns. But if the frame is a large one, it may be greatly elaborated with a large variety of motifs—conventionalized cobra hoods, single or double wavy lines, rows of lozenges, loops with small projections round the belly. The area may then be subdivided into panels by broad bars enhanced with similar geometric motifs. Finally the objects to be portrayed are plastered within the frame or panels, generally on a slightly lower relief than the outer surrounding lines.

The Gond and Baiga doors follow the general pattern of the wall-decorations. They are nearly always double-leaved and are made to swing on slots in the door-frame. I have not found any lintels attached to these doors, though they are common among the Konds and can be found among the Saoras (Fig. 173). Apart from the lintels, the doors of the Orissa tribesmen differ from those I have seen in the Central Provinces in a comparative paucity of geometric motif, a lack of finish and a somewhat more haphazard arrangement of themes. Doors made for the Konds by Pano carpenters, however, are of an entirely different style (Fig. 116). The Santal doors are carved with great vigour, but the frames and setting of those I saw (and they were not many) lacked the logical arrangement dear to the Gonds and Baigas.

The Gond or Baiga craftsman makes a frame two or three inches broad round each leaf of the door, which he then divides into half a dozen small

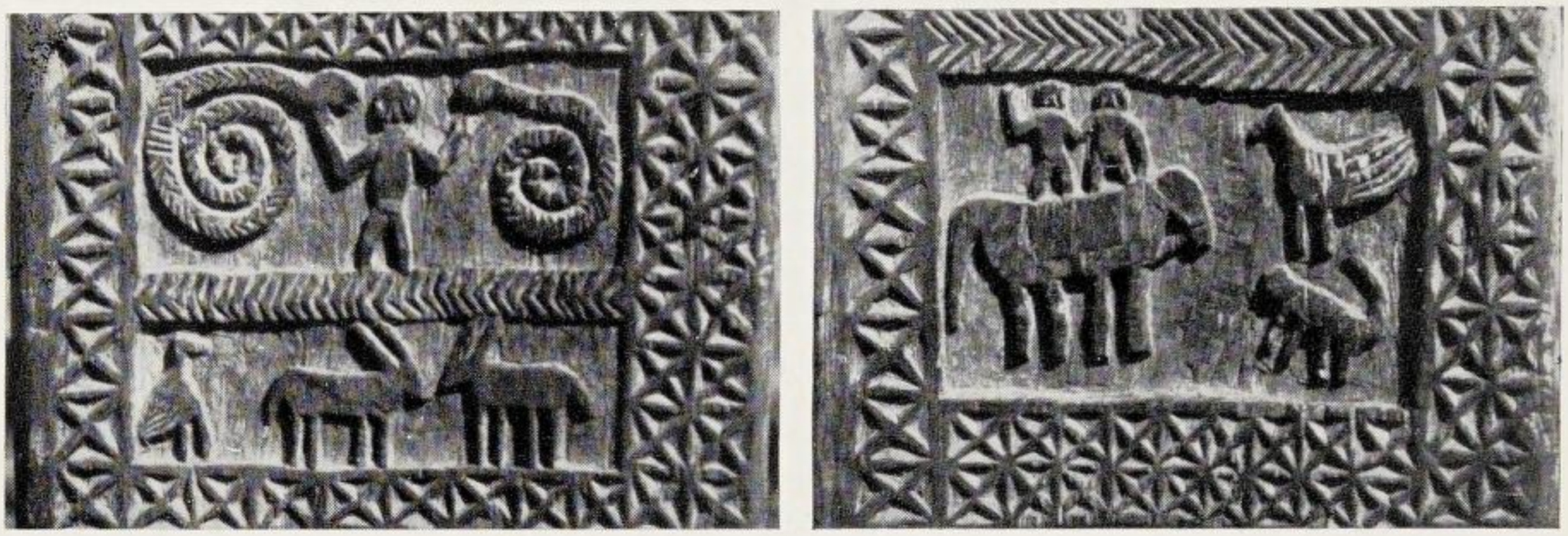


FIG. 105. *Carved panels from Baiga doors from Bilaspur District, C.P.*

panels by bands which continue the general motif of the frame; he decorates frame and bands with a variety of geometric designs —the usual herring-bone, zigzag, hatching or rows of small lozenges. Within the panels, each of which may be about nine inches square (though a not uncommon size is a rectangle of six by nine inches) he carves the design. This is often representative of animals and human beings, but it is quite in order for the tribal artist to content himself with straightforward geometric motifs. Particularly popular are various kinds of circles—the flower pattern derived from intersecting circles, a spiral, a circle enhanced with alternate triangles hatched in opposite directions; on one Baiga door is the rare design of a circle round which triangles are placed.

The actual 'pictures' are made sometimes by the simple incision of lines, which show an animal, for example, in outline; the body of the animal may be left plain or it may be filled in with hatching or bands. More commonly perhaps, the wood is cut away to allow the pattern to stand out in low relief.

In all this carving and modelling there is naturally a great deal of simplification. Men and animals appear without anatomical detail and with little indication of clothes or ornament, as if they were in silhouette. There is also, in some instances, a still further advance into the same kind of symbolization that has been noticed for other cultures. I show elsewhere how the human figure becomes a geometrical symbol.

Fig. 132, which was made by a Pardhan, affords a remarkable parallel to Fig. 145 which was made by a Kond hundreds of miles away. In the former the figures of the dancers lose themselves in a geometric design.

The most common method of symbolization is to show a thing by its parts. The breasts or vulva suggest the human figure. In the Pardhan or Gond treatment of birds a very simple impression of a pair of wings turns gradually into a geometric figure (Fig. 109). In the frieze of sigma on a Santal *banam* (Fig. 103) there is a highly stylized treatment of a flight of birds.

So, too, fish are suggested by their bones (Figs. 107 and 108) and

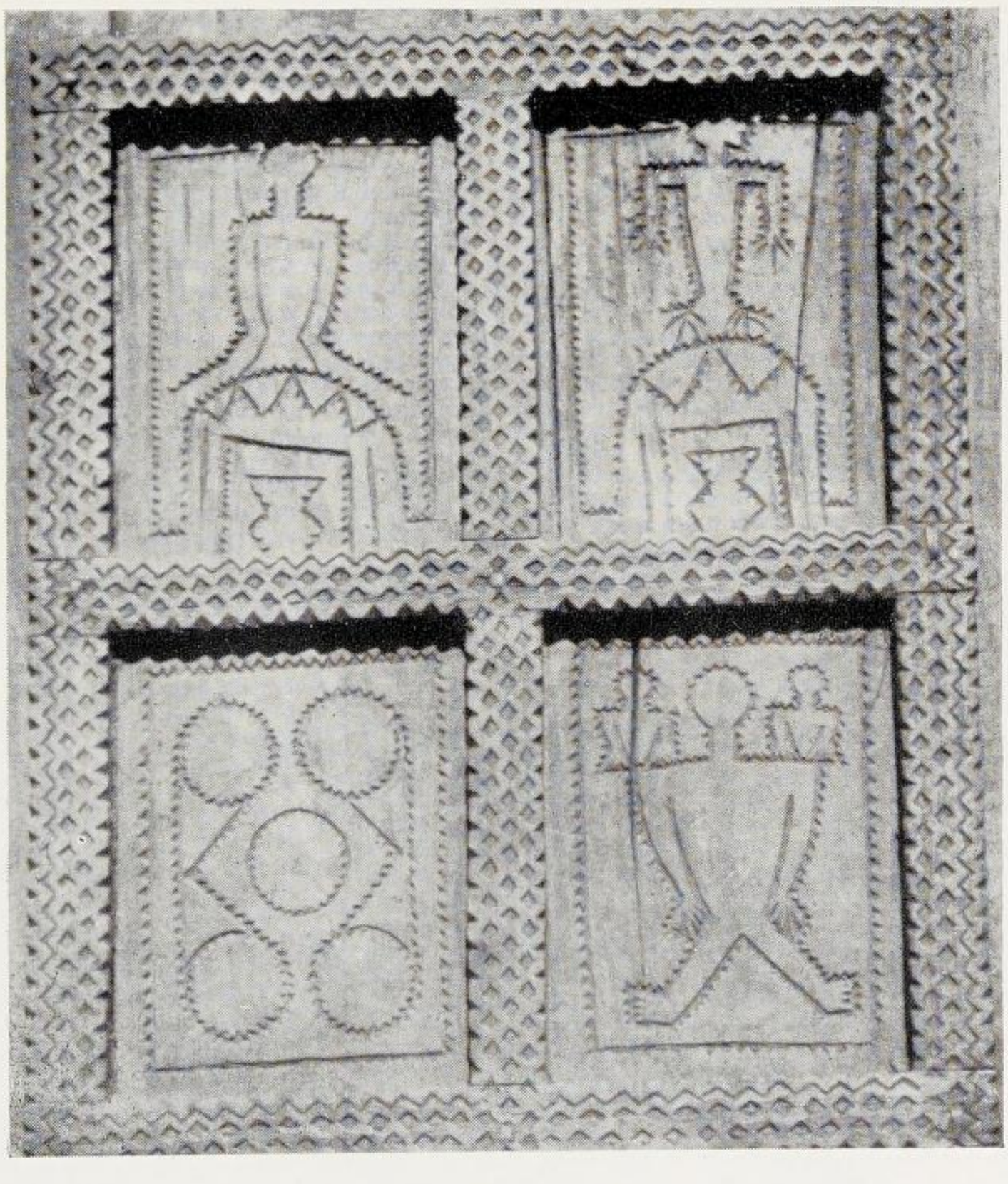


Fig. 106. *Panel of a Kuttia Kond door at Rajjim, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

the tortoise by its flippers. Fish are notoriously symbolic of fertility, but they are not often drawn; the tortoise, which stands for stability, is designed in white or red wash on the floor of a Gond house to ensure that the building will be secure.

Here we are back again in the realm of not-too-serious magic; I doubt if anybody really believes that if he has a fish on his wall he will get more babies or if he has a tortoise on his floor his house will not fall down. But these things give a pleasant feeling; they look well and they are auspicious; they help, along with the entirely secular designs, to make a pleasant place to live in.

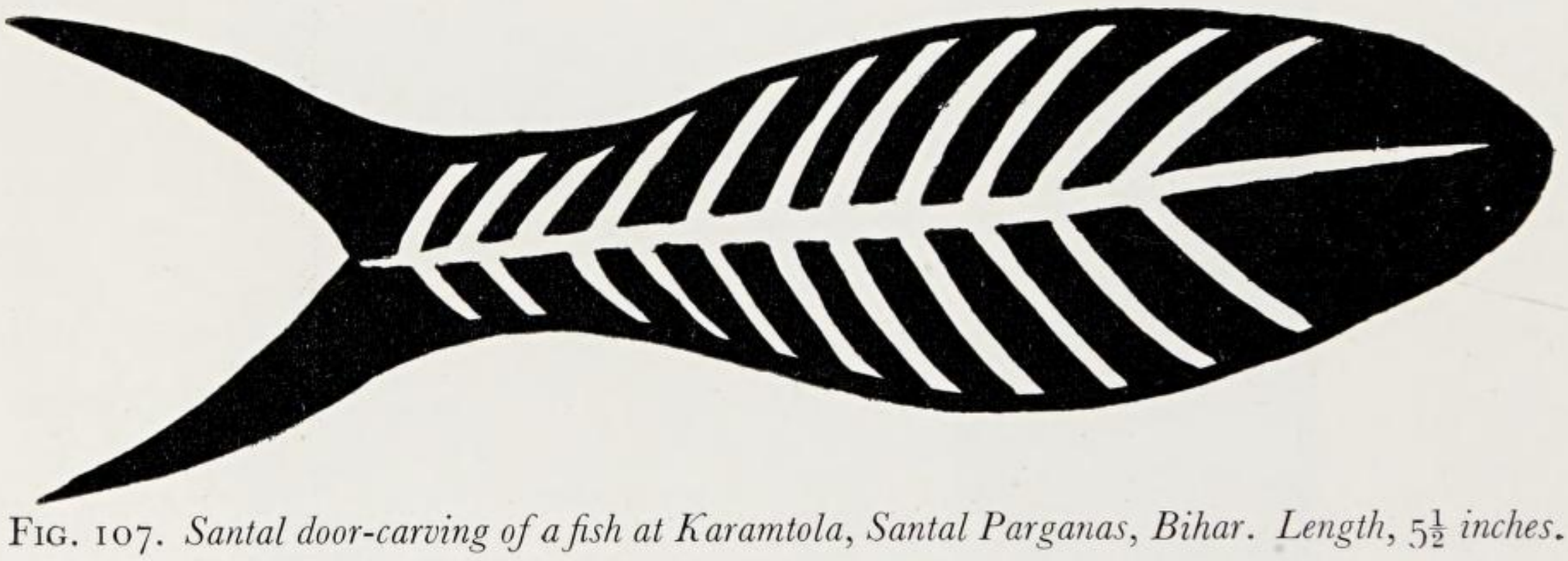


FIG. 107. *Santal door-carving of a fish at Karamtola, Santal Parganas, Bihar. Length,* $5\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

FIG. 108. *Kond door-carving of a fish at Jantri, Koraput District, Orissa. Length,* $5\frac{3}{4}$ *inches.*

FIG. 109. *Gond wall-decoration representing flying birds, Mandla District, C.P.*

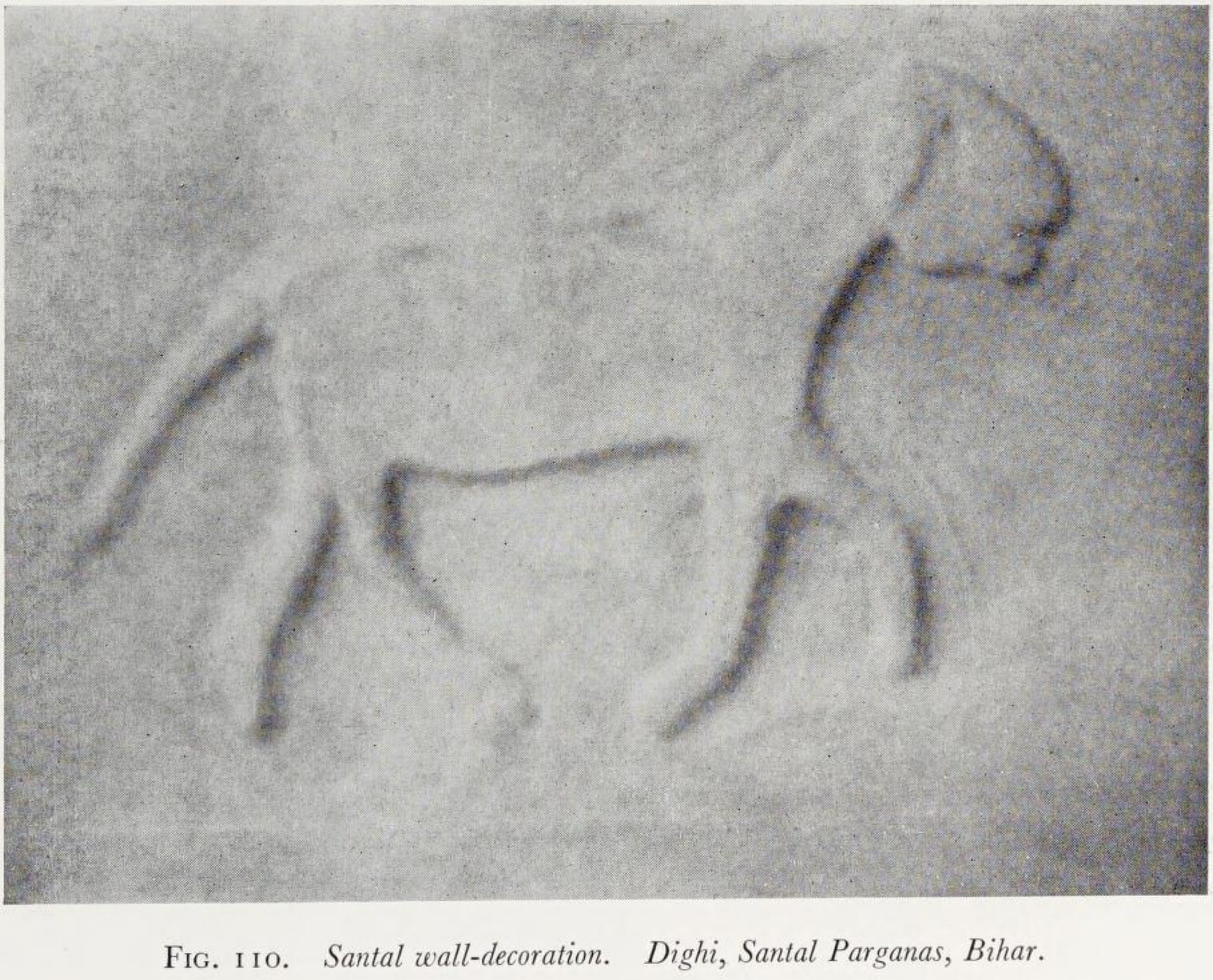


FIG. 110. *Santal wall-decoration. Dighi, Santal Parganas, Bihar.*

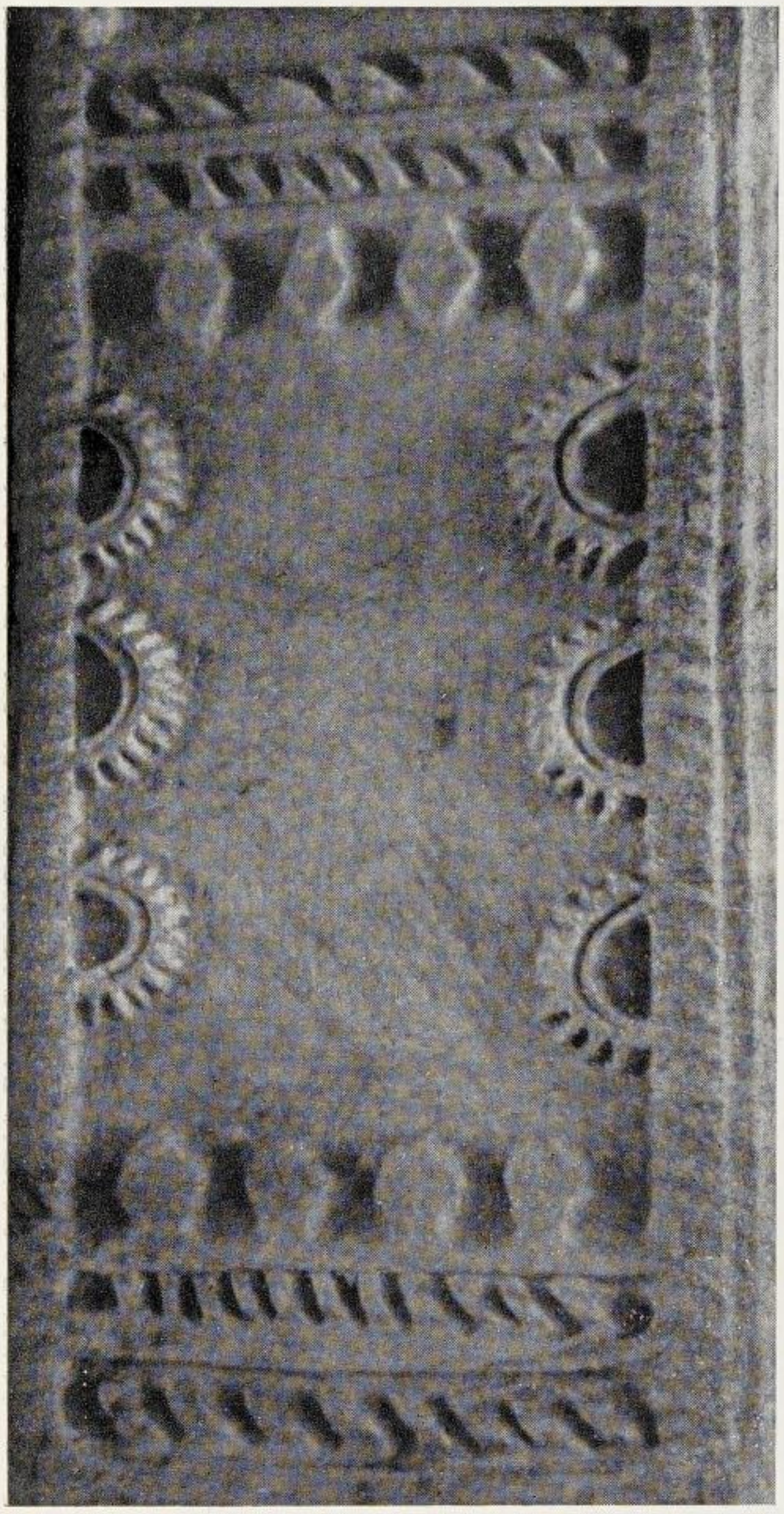


FIG. 111. *Typical Gond wall-decoration, Mandla District, C.P.*

FIG. 112. *Pardhan wall-decoration. Mandla District, C.P.*

FIG. 113. *Muria carving on a pillar at Chandabera, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*

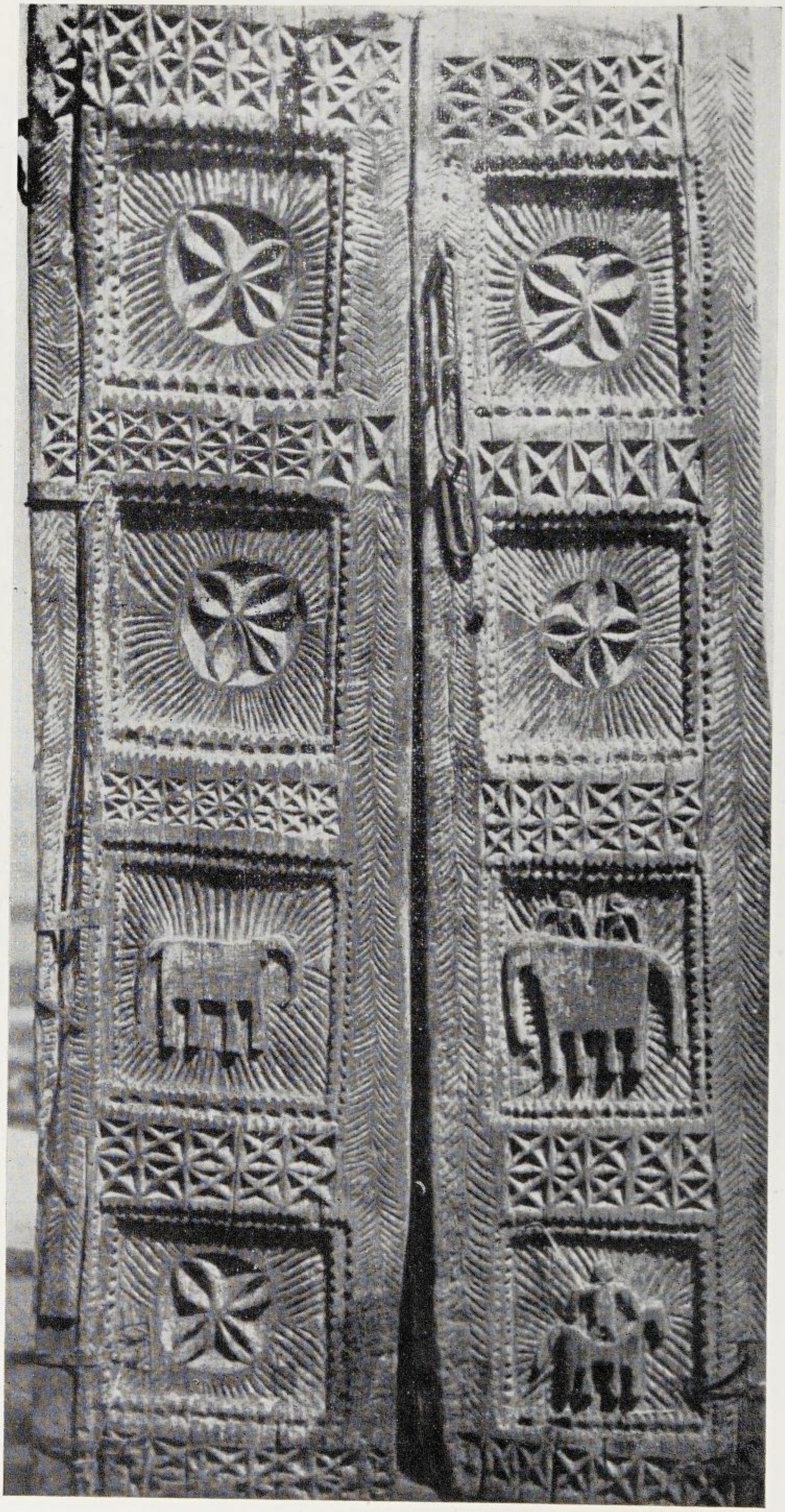


FIG. 114. *Carved panels of Baiga doors from Bilaspur District, C.P.*

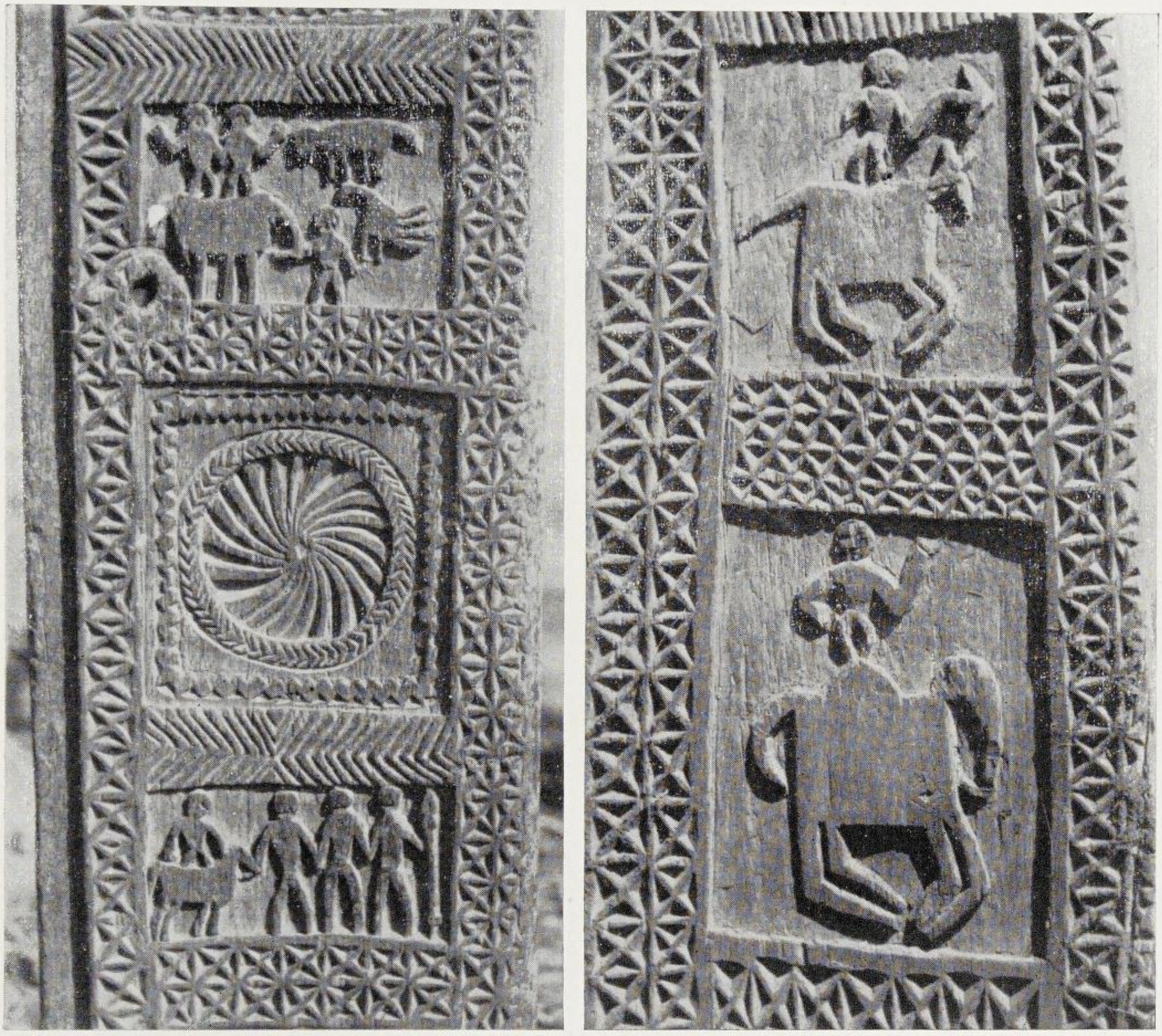


FIG. 115. *Carved panels of Baiga doors from Bilaspur District, C.P.*

FIG. 116. *Part of a door carved by a Pano for a Kuttia Kond house, Rangaparu, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

FIG. 117. *Chair made by Nijri Sardar, the headman of Surujbera, a Saoria Paharia village in the Santal Parganas, Bihar.*

XII

Totemic Emblems

In India, totemism has failed, rather remarkably, to exercise any influence on tribal art. Many tribes are still totemic in a faded sort of way, and we might well have expected to find representations of the totem animal or plant on walls and pillars or at the very least in tattoo patterns. But this is not the case; you may go to a Gond house where the family totem is a dog or a Kond house where it is a peacock, but never a carving or picture will you find. This sort of thing has long been a source of disappointment to anthropologists.

The only tribe which honours its totems artistically, so far as I know, is the Uraon. The actual animals and plants which are the totems of the various Uraon clans do not appear to be the object of any religious observance. But many villages preserve wood or clay emblems of animals which represent the totems of the original settlers of the place. Thus, if the founders of a village belonged to the Tiger clan, a carved wooden tiger will be found there today. In another village there may be a crocodile; in another an elephant. At festivals and the great Jatra dances these emblems are taken out of the priest's house, where they are normally accommodated, and are bathed, painted and offered rice-beer and fowls. The emblems are believed to be closely connected with the 'luck' of a place, and when people take goods for sale at a bazaar they make little offerings in the hope of improving their fortune.

I believe that the images of horses and elephants are comparatively modern and are not regarded with quite the same awe as the others. At all events, it is permitted to ride on them (Fig. 121) but this is taboo where the emblem is a tiger.

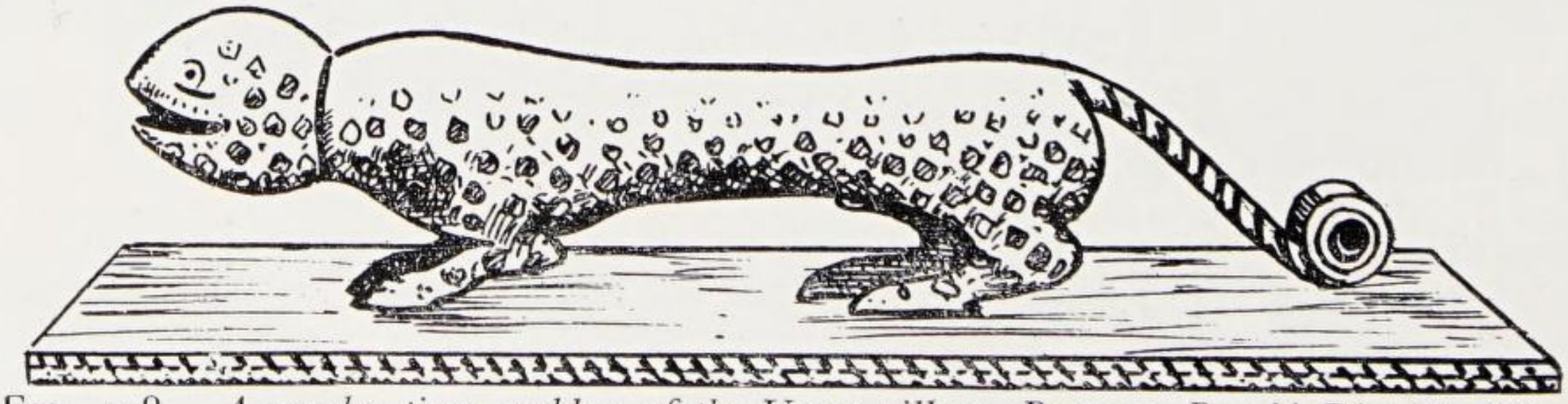


Fig. 118. *A wooden tiger, emblem of the Uraon village, Prayago, Ranchi District, Bihar. (From a photograph by S. C. Roy.)*

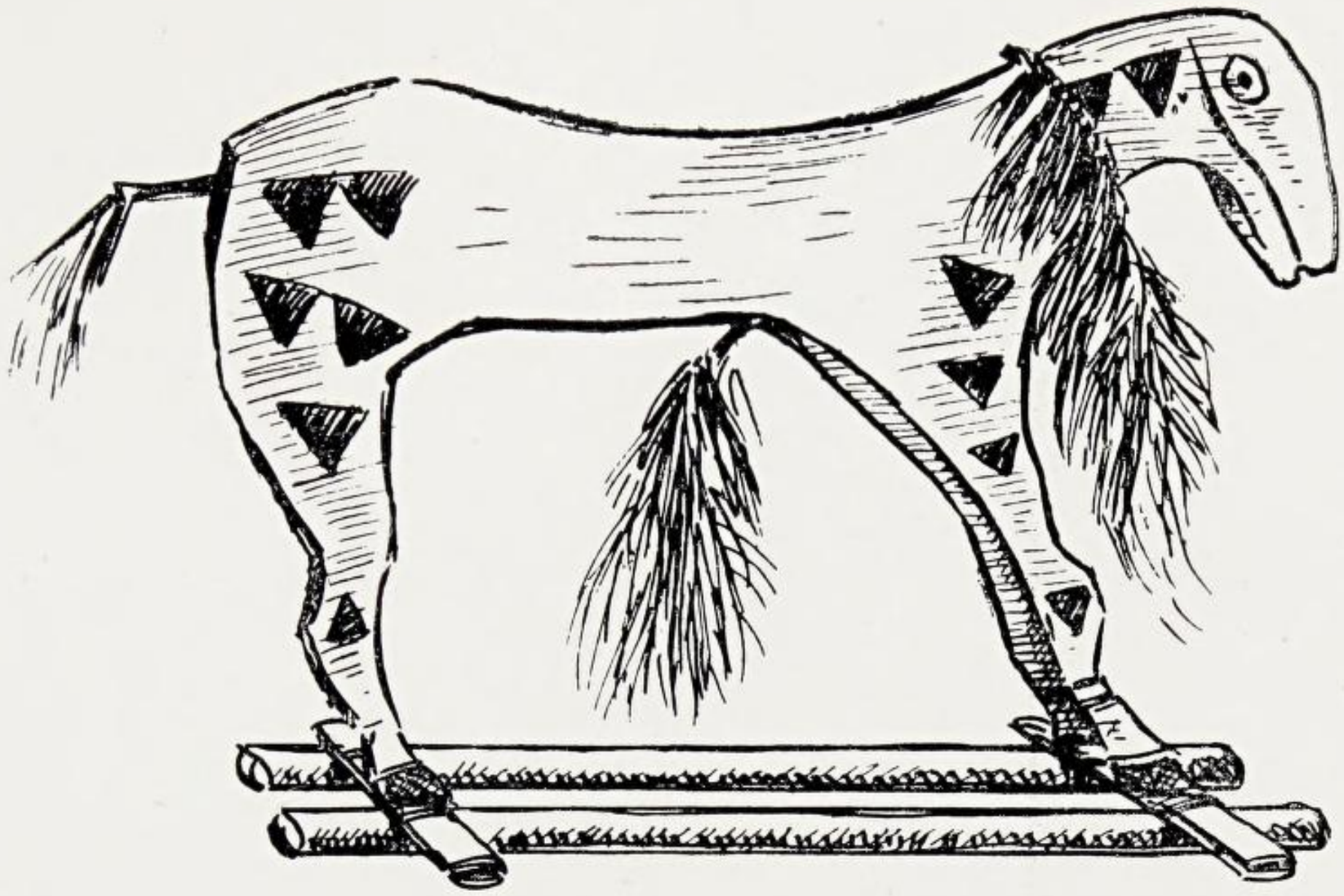


FIG. 119. *Wooden horse carried as a village emblem to a Jatra.*
(From a photograph by S. C. Roy.)

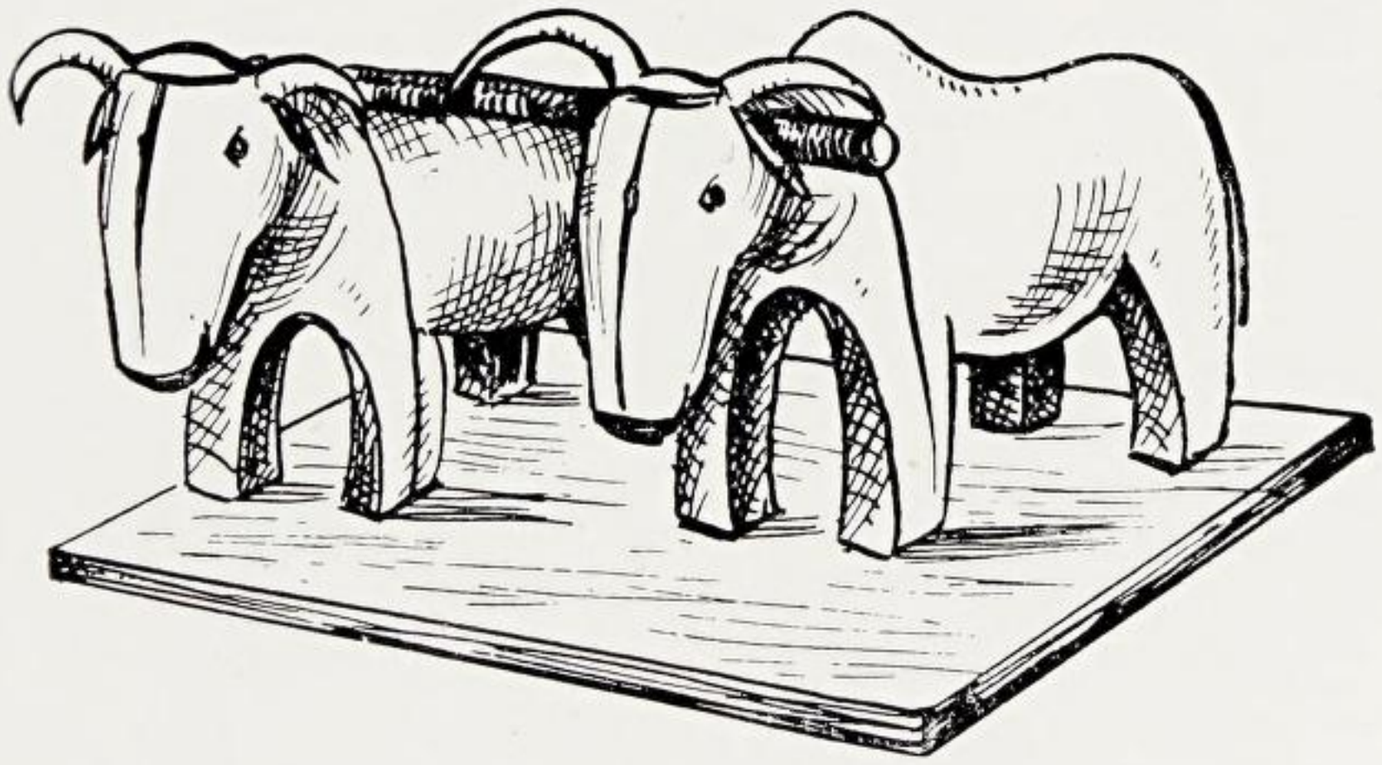


FIG. 120. *Uraon emblems; wooden plough-bullocks.*
(From a photograph by S. C. Roy.)

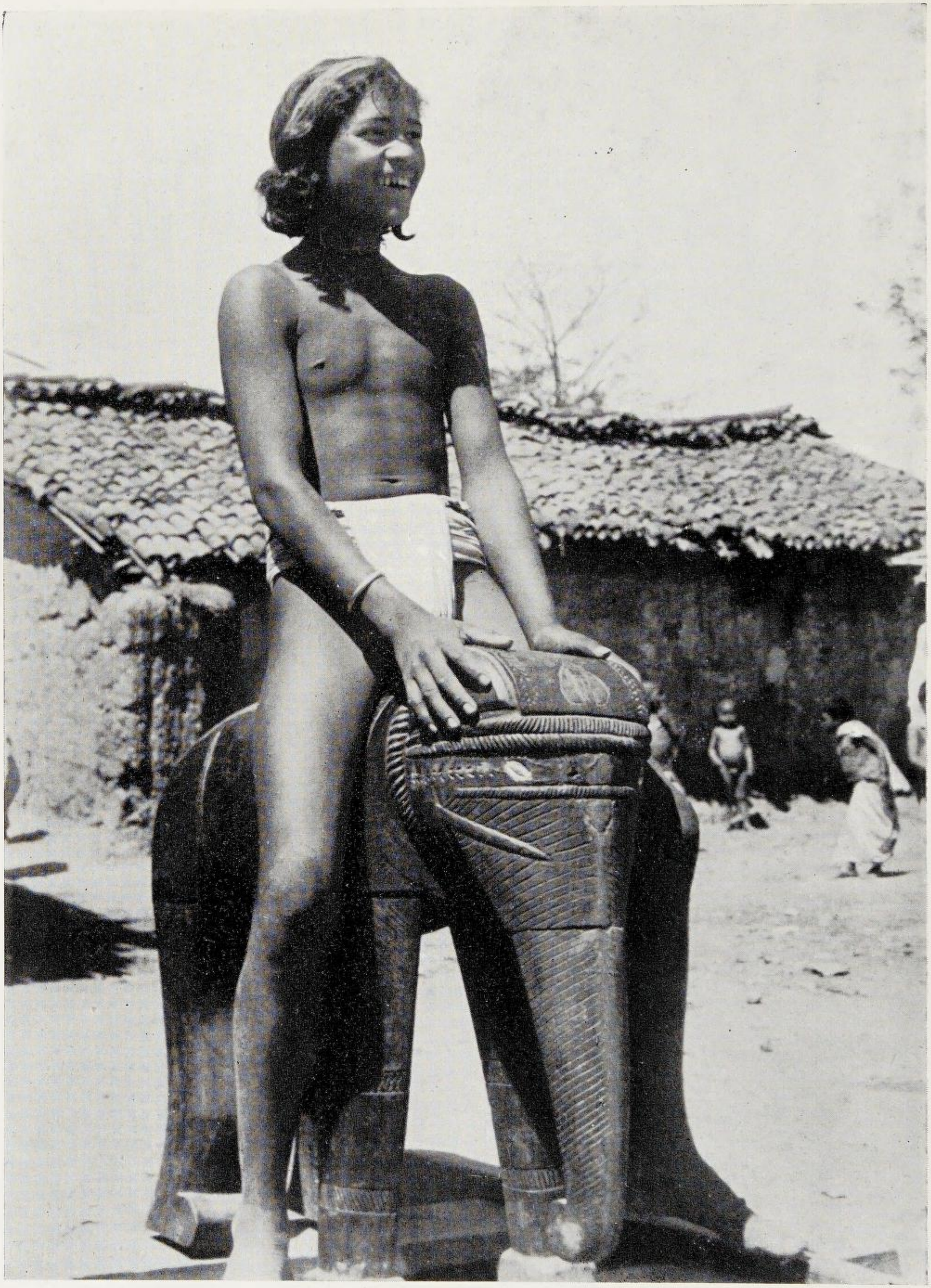


FIG. 121. *Uraon youth riding on a wooden elephant, the emblem of his village.*

XIII

The Human Figure

ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGES of the gods are rare in tribal India. The Gonds make no images of Baro Deo; the Murias, who so clearly envisage his personality, never attempt to portray Lingo Pen, though they make for him a fantastic symbol of the Anga type (Fig. 92); no Baiga draws Nanga Baiga in his habit as he lived. Still less are there any attempts to represent the Supreme Being who behaves in so strikingly human a way in most tribal legends. There are no shrines to Bhagavan among the Gonds and Baigas, no Muria images of Mahapurub, a few stones are enough for the Earth Mother of the Konds. Tribal shrines are usually empty, except for stones or pillars, throughout Orissa, Bihar and the Central Provinces.

The Saoras, however, are, in some areas, exceptional in this respect. They sometimes carve images of their gods, even of high important gods, and they often portray them in their pictographs. I illustrate these and the images of Sahibosum and his wife in other sections. At a village called Bodo Okhra in the Parlakimedi Maliahs, I found many small figures of a god and his wife, sometimes with altar stones before them. I was told that they represented Patha Munda and Galbesum, who fulfilled many of the functions of a Supreme Being. They were worshipped at the major festivals and when the forest was fired for cultivation (Fig. 130). In a neighbouring village there was the very interesting image of the Maimed God (Fig. 129). One day this god, who was what is called a Kittung, broke open a rock and fire came out of it. A bit of the broken rock hurt his head on the left

FIG. 122. ABOVE. *Representation of dancers drawn on the wall of a Gond house at Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P. Half actual size.*

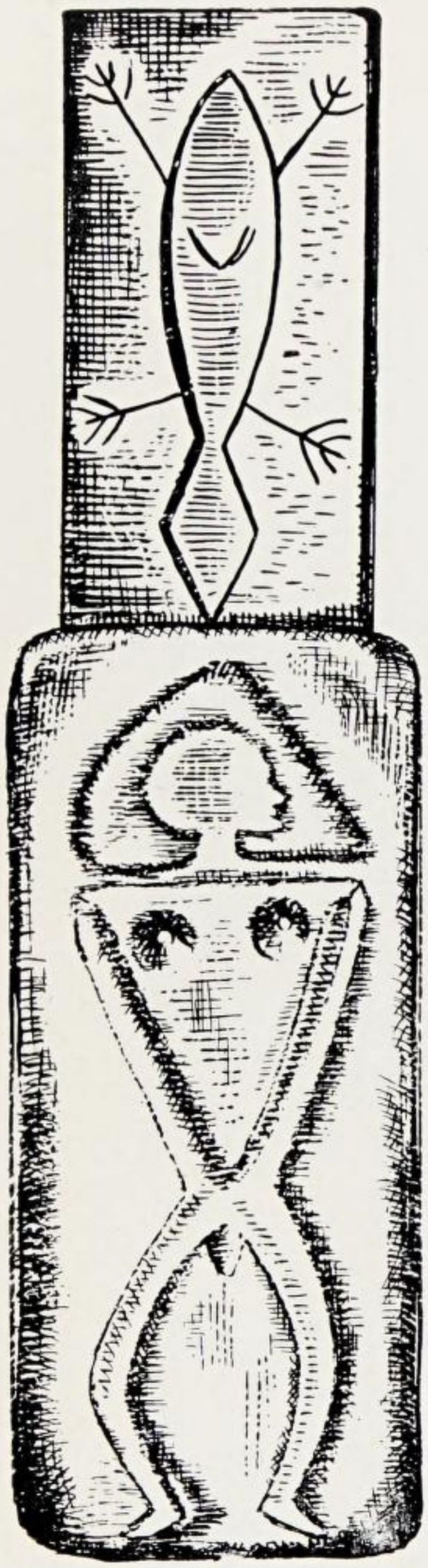


FIG. 123. *Bhuiya carving on the central pillar of the boys' dormitory at Raisua, Bonai, Orissa.*

side, and the fire was so fierce that it burnt his hands and feet; the wounds were so bad that he remained lame and maimed on his mountain-side. There are many tribal legends of a Great Person who is killed or wounded and from whose body the world is created, but this tale seems to be of another kind. The wounds, however, were regarded as honourable, and the Saoras made a small image of *Bassia latifolia* showing them, and placed it in a shrine. In this case the attempt at making the god human was not carried very far.

The scarcity of religious images is equalled by the curious rarity of portrayal of the heroes who so richly fill tribal myths and tales. How fascinating would be a Juang drawing of the hero Rusi and his savage Asur maiden or a Baiga conception of Nanga Baiga discovering liquor or a Santal picture of the destruction of the world by fire. The tribal legends are as rich in pictorial themes as the Epics and Puranas, yet they are scarcely ever exploited. It is only where Hindu influence is strong that we get aboriginal attempts to draw scenes from the old classics or an occasional incident (as of Bodrahin—Fig. 93) from the Pardhan epics.

There is indeed a Gond female figure (Fig. 131) which represents the spirit of a tank to which the sky is married to ensure a good supply of rain—the idea is Hindu, but the artistic conception is thoroughly aboriginal. The marriage posts in Figs. 76 and 78 stand for the legendary figure of Ahibarran, but they do not show him in action; he is simply sitting in the attic of his palace with his arms outspread. Generally, however, the human figures that are made are those of ordinary people, like the Muria

dolls (Fig. 128) which represent boy and girl members of the ghotul-dormitory, or the Bhuiya images (Fig. 125) of a popular village headman and his wife.

In the Santal Parganas musical instruments are commonly decorated with human figures, and here the carving is more dynamic. The best example is the superb *banam* (Fig. 148) with its row of dancers and drummers. On a Mal Paharia *sarangi* are two dancers; one has his hand above his head, a conventional gesture which is repeated by the Gond dancers with flying skirts in Fig. 149. A similar convention will be noticed on a Juang comb (Fig. 48); here the design is elaborate, for the head and legs of each dancer bristle with a fringe of tiny triangles and, though the face is entirely blank, body, arms and legs are carefully hatched. Some of the figures are drawn with convincing vigour.

A study of these images will show that the representation is on the whole realistic. There is some distortion, it is true; the erogenous zones are often exaggerated and it will be noticed that the vulva is more readily displayed than the breasts or penis. The reason is probably technical, for it is comparatively easy to make an aperture into the wood, but to carve organs standing out of the body demands careful planning in the reduction of the original material.

Carved images do not give much scope for symbolization; this is more common in wall-paintings and carvings in the flat. The simplest symbols of the human form are where a part

FIG. 124. *Central pillar of a Saora house in the Peddakimedi Maliahs. It is carved with representations of human breasts. At a betrothal a boy's father places an arrow between them.*

stands for the whole; a woman is represented by breasts or the vulva. A pair of breasts is, in fact, a common decorative motif; it may be seen on the cross-beams of Kond shrines, in the Muria and Juang dormitories, on Saora pillars. When a Saora goes to betroth a girl, he drives an arrow into the ground between a pair of breasts (Fig. 124) carved on the central pillar of the house. The vulva is carved by Bondos on trees in their sacred groves, by Murias on dormitory pillars as well as on combs and tobacco-cases, and by Baiga youths on trees in the forest beneath which they have arranged to meet their lovers.

Male erotic symbols are uncommon; the most striking is that from a Bhuiya dormitory, where the male is shown as a tortoise descending upon a woman (Fig. 123).

A slightly more elaborate simplification of the human figure will be found in the Pardhan modelling of a chevron surmounted by two knobs (Fig. 133); this design sometimes appears in a row, when it probably implies a party of dancers. In the Gond wall-paintings for the Krishna festival, the human figure is indicated by a pair of opposed triangles, which are sometimes filled in (Fig. 122); the Saoras often use a single triangle with head and legs attached, though sometimes, like the Gonds, they draw two triangles with points meeting at the waist (Fig. 126).

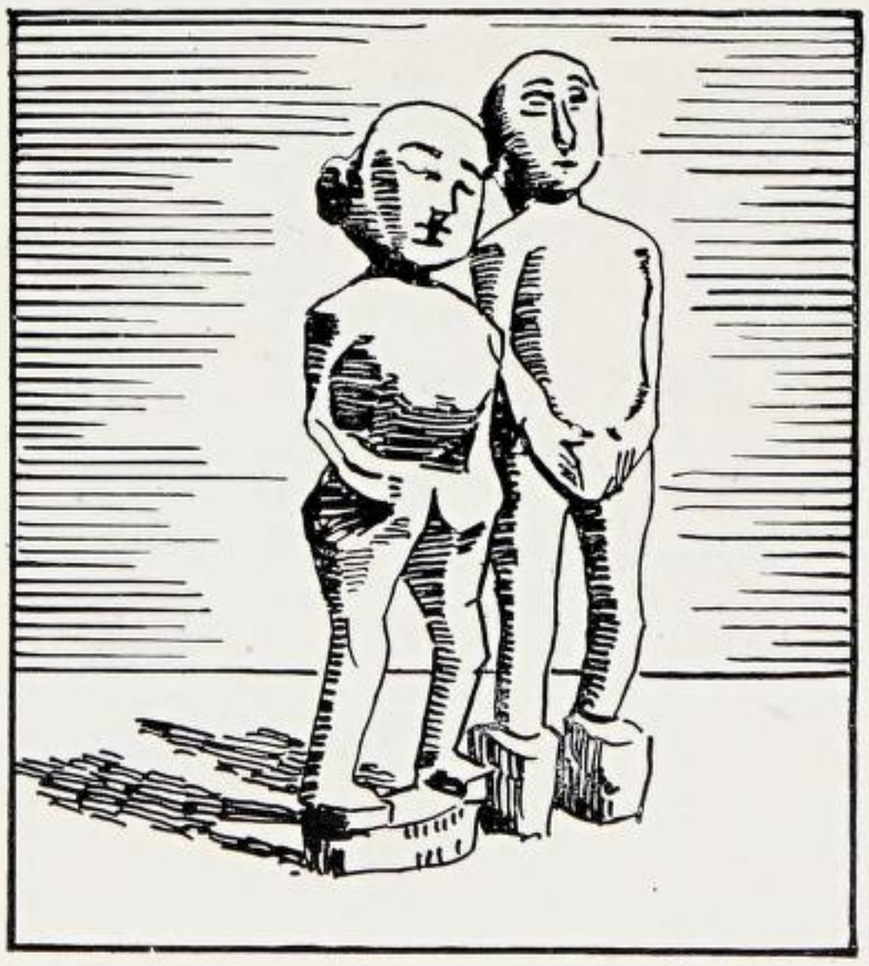


FIG. 125. *Bhuiya images of a Dihuri (headman) and his wife on the veranda of the boys' dormitory at Talapada, Keonjhar, Orissa. They are made of* Boswellia serrata *wood and reddened with earth. Height,* $25\frac{1}{2}$ *and* 23 *inches respectively.*

FIG. 126. *Conventional Saora representation of the human figure, carved on a door at Sukulipada, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 127. *Juang Venus carved on the door of the boys' dormitory at Balipal, Keonjhar, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 128. *Muria dolls, attached to wooden gongs and used on dancing expeditions. Carefully carved from* Trewia nudiflora *wood. Palli, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar. Height,* 15½ *and* 15 *inches.*

FIG. 129. *Saora image of the maimed Kittung. Arangulu, Koraput District, Orissa. Height,* $10\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

FIG. 130. *Saora images of demigods, Patha Munda and Galbesum, from a shrine at Bodo Okhra, Ganjam District, Orissa. They are made of* Boswellia serrata *wood, darkened with myrabolam juice. The only signs of sex-differentiation are that the female is smaller, has tiny breasts and wears a different kind of hat. Height,* $13\frac{3}{4}$ *and* $11\frac{3}{4}$ *inches respectively.*

FIG. 131. *Female figure, made by a Gond to represent the spirit of a tank near Gadasarai, Mandla District, C.P. Carved in the round out of* Boswellia serrata *wood and darkened with myrabolam juice. Cowries are used for eyes, horse-hair for the head and a small moustache. There are glass ornaments in the ears. There are no breasts, but there is an exaggerated vagina misplaced under the body. Height, 27 inches.*

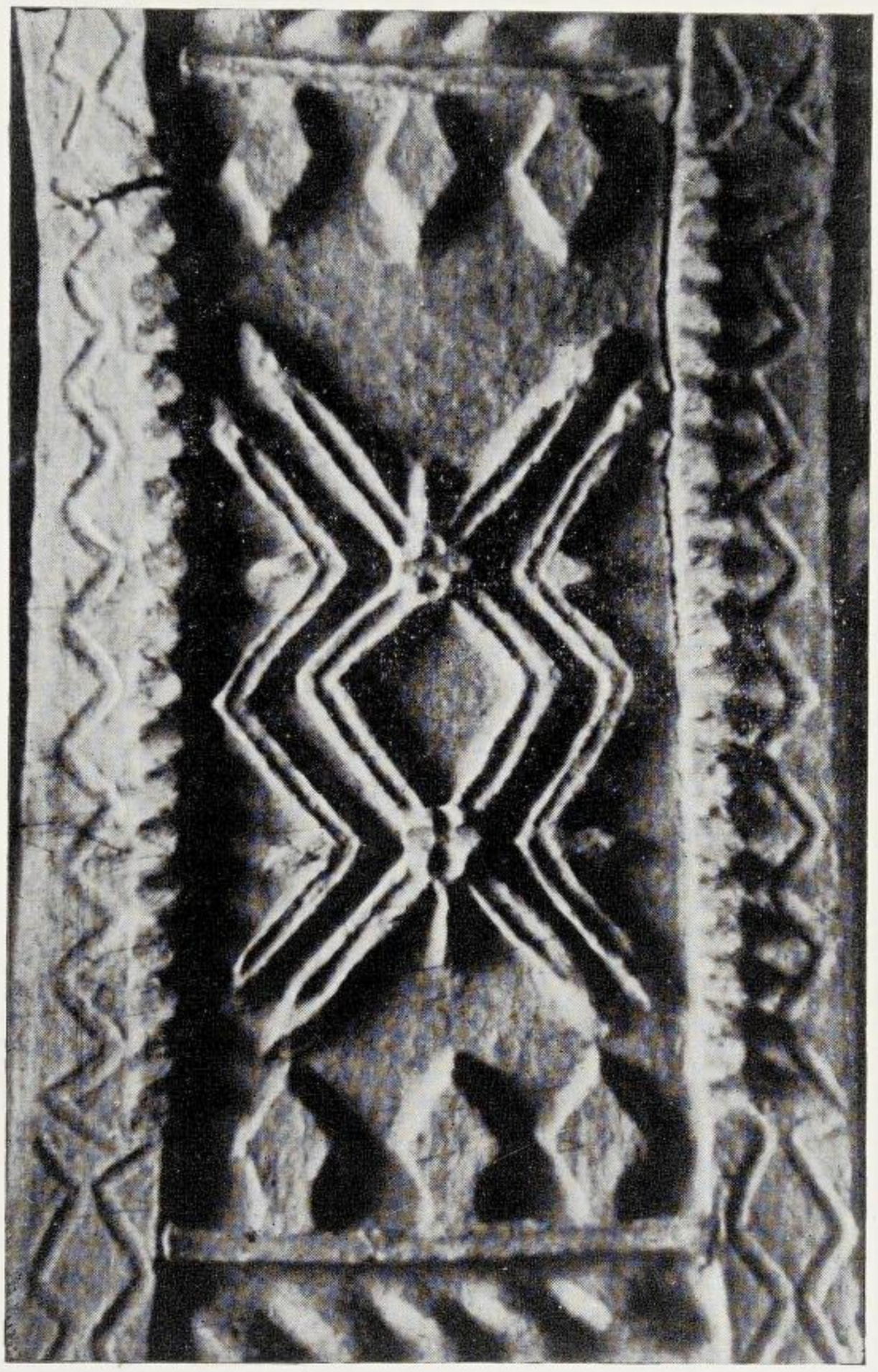


FIG. 132. *Modelling, probably representing dancers, on the wall of a Gond house at Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P. Height, 42 inches.* (*Compare* FIG. 145.)

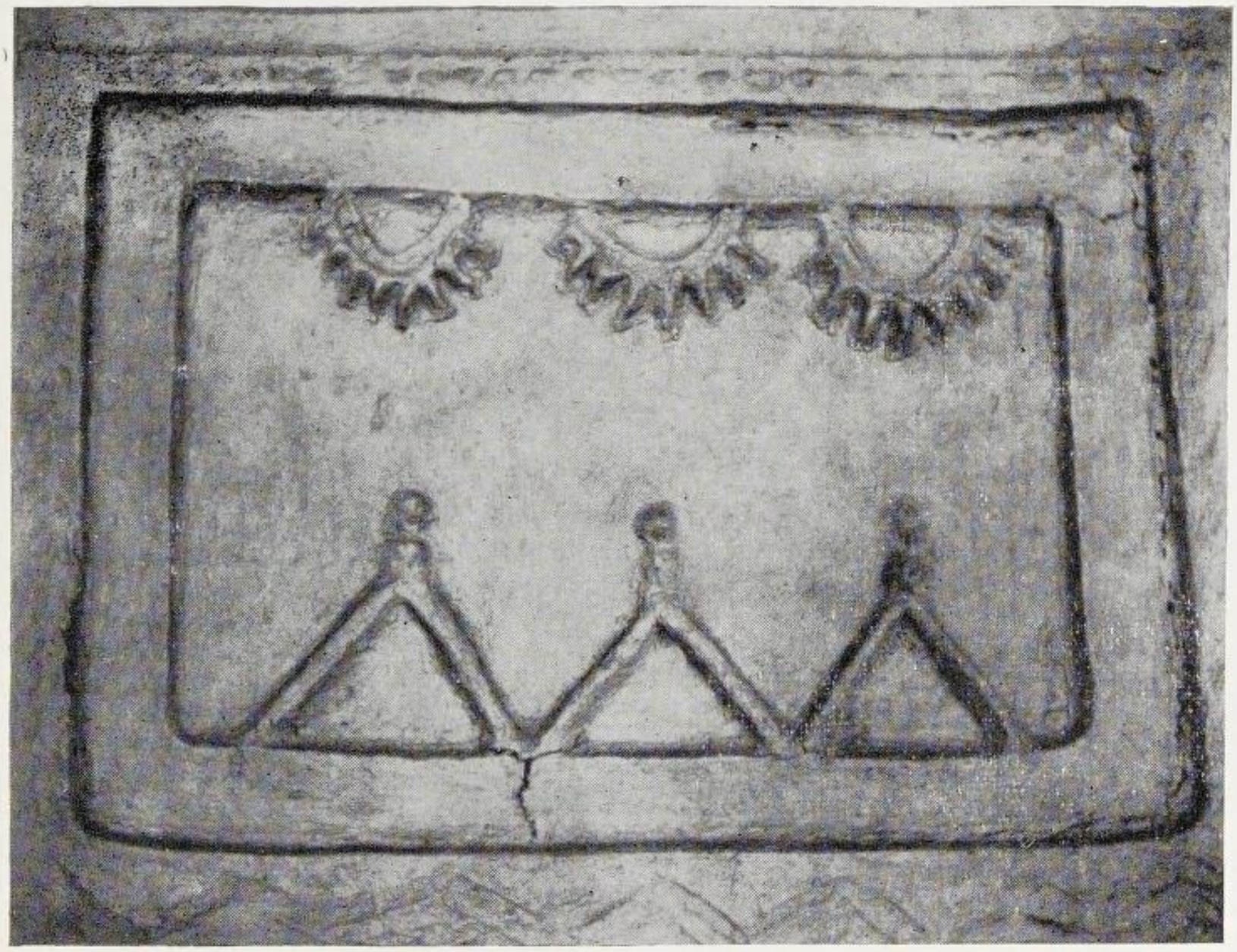


FIG. 133. *Pardhan wall-decoration modelled in mud and whitened with clay, symbolizing human figures. Length, 33 inches.*

FIG. 134. *Detail of Bison-horn funerary pillar for Kopa Dhurwa at Massenar, Dantewara Tahsil, Bastar, representing a party of dancers refreshing themselves with rice-beer.*

XIV

Sahibosum

In modern India a sahib is not necessarily, or even usually, a European; it is almost anything in a pair of trousers and a sola topee. The worship of Sahibosum, therefore, is not to be regarded as having any particular reference to the British occupation; it is a local cult, apparently confined to the Hill Saoras of the Ganjam District, which aims at keeping divine and human visitors out of the way. Many tribes do their best to achieve this. For the fortnight of the Chait Parab festival the Bondos, never very hospitable, block the approaches to their villages with thorns. Marias in Bastar burn through the piles of bridges and make false tracks to lead the traveller astray. For any stranger, even if he is a nice stranger—and most strangers are very far from nice—is a great nuisance to the aboriginals. The divine visitor makes them ill, the human pesters them with questions. The gods demand buffaloes and pigs; a Sub-Inspector of Police will want at least a goat. No one feels quite at ease with an outsider—be he deity or anthropologist—hanging about the place. And while divine strangers are more immediately destructive, human beings bring with them the infection of their own alien magic and foreign gods. At the end of any official camp the Saoras and Konds offer sacrifices to Mother Earth and the village deities; in Parlakimedi, I found the tariff was a fowl for a policeman, a pig for a Conservator of Forests, and a buffalo for an anthropologist.

Sahibosum is, in fact, the projection of a tribal xenophobia in concrete form. He is the sahib-god but not, it must be noted, the god of the sahibs. He is the touring officer of the other world; he is always on tour and so perpetually making a nuisance of himself. His particular vanity is to reward his hosts with every kind of epidemic.

FIG. 135. *Shrine to Sahibosum outside Liabo village, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

One of his earliest manifestations was in a wild little village called Karanjaju, where he gave everyone cholera. At that time no one had ever heard of him, and when the old familiar gods, interrogated in the usual way, denied responsibility for the disaster, the shamans were nonplussed. One night, however, Sahibosum came to one of them in a dream and declared, 'I am a new god. I live in the land of the sahibs and go with my wife touring through the world. Now I have come to see you Saoras.'

The priest replied, 'Then take what you will and go your way.' The god replied, 'I want no sacrifices. But make images of me and my wife and set them on the path towards the west and sacrifice to me there.' The Saoras hurriedly obeyed, and it is said that the epidemic ceased.

Sahibosum

There was a similar tradition in the large and open Parisal. Here the shaman dreamt that a man and his wife, wearing garlands and with flowers in their hair, were dancing in the village street. When he asked them what they were doing, they replied, 'We are from Assam, the land of sahibs, and we have come to dance from village to village.' The next day many people fell ill with vomiting and fever; and that night the worried shaman had another dream, and when he saw what he must do he had images made and so checked the trouble.

The Saora pictograph (Fig. 137), from the wall of a house in Angda, shows Sahibosum and his sahib friends in the top row, the god's wife and her friends in the bottom row, and in between a criss-cross pattern which represents a bed for them to sit on. I was told that the drawing was made because 'long ago our ancestors warned us that one day the sahibs would come and give us a great deal of trouble. But they said that if we made drawings of Sahibosum and his wife, it would not be so bad.'

The image of Sahibosum, therefore, has a purpose directly contrary to that of the ordinary idol. It is not intended to localize a sense of vague divinity in anthropomorphic form; it does not bring god near his worshipper, it shoos him off; it does not try—as the Catholic or Hindu image tries—to lead from the unknown to the known, from the unreal to the real: it aims rather to save the devotee from an unknown that has made itself most unpleasantly known, from an unreal that is all too grimly real.

The aim of the image of Sahibosum is

FIG. 136. *Wooden figures of Sahibosum and his wife on the path leading to Sinkulipadar, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height of taller image, 50 inches.*

thus to keep god out and, by the normal process of homoeopathic magic, to keep out also those who resemble him, the touring officer, the inquisitive police and every other kind of visitor.

The images are worshipped regularly, and once the cult has started it has to be maintained. It is always dangerous to drop a god. In some places new images are made every year; in others only when the old ones decay. Old images are allowed to lie rotting on the ground—at Dokripanga I saw many lying on the village boundary. The need of constant renewal provides, of course, considerable scope for the local carpenter.

The images are roughly carved in wood, sometimes with a certain distortion of the erogenous areas; the male is usually, though not always, taller than the female. It is obvious that the figures must be placed outside a village, on a main path leading to it; they are usually unprotected, though at Liabo there was a little shrine (Fig. 135). At Parisal there was a stone slab for the offering of the usual sacrifices.

Anyone 'who knows how' can make these images; there is no special clan of dedicated craftsmen. The carpenter goes fasting to the forest in search of a suitable *Shorea robusta* tree. He brings the wood to one of the village shrines and a priest offers it rice and liquor. Then still fasting the carpenter fashions the figures with axe and knife. When he has finished, the priest again offers rice and liquor and the people carry them down the path out of the village, escorted by drums and a great company of children. At the chosen place the priest digs holes in the ground and erects the images; once he has done so the drums must cease and not sound again. Then he offers a pig and a goat, saying, 'You came to see our country and our village. We have taken a lot of trouble to please you; now depart and trouble us no more.'

These Saora figures range in size from three to seven feet and

impress the traveller not only by the rugged strength and sometimes fantastic caricature of their carving but by the wild and lonely places where they stand; I shall not easily forget the shock of surprise and awe when I saw them for the first time at the top of a desolate pass near Karanjaju (Fig. 139).

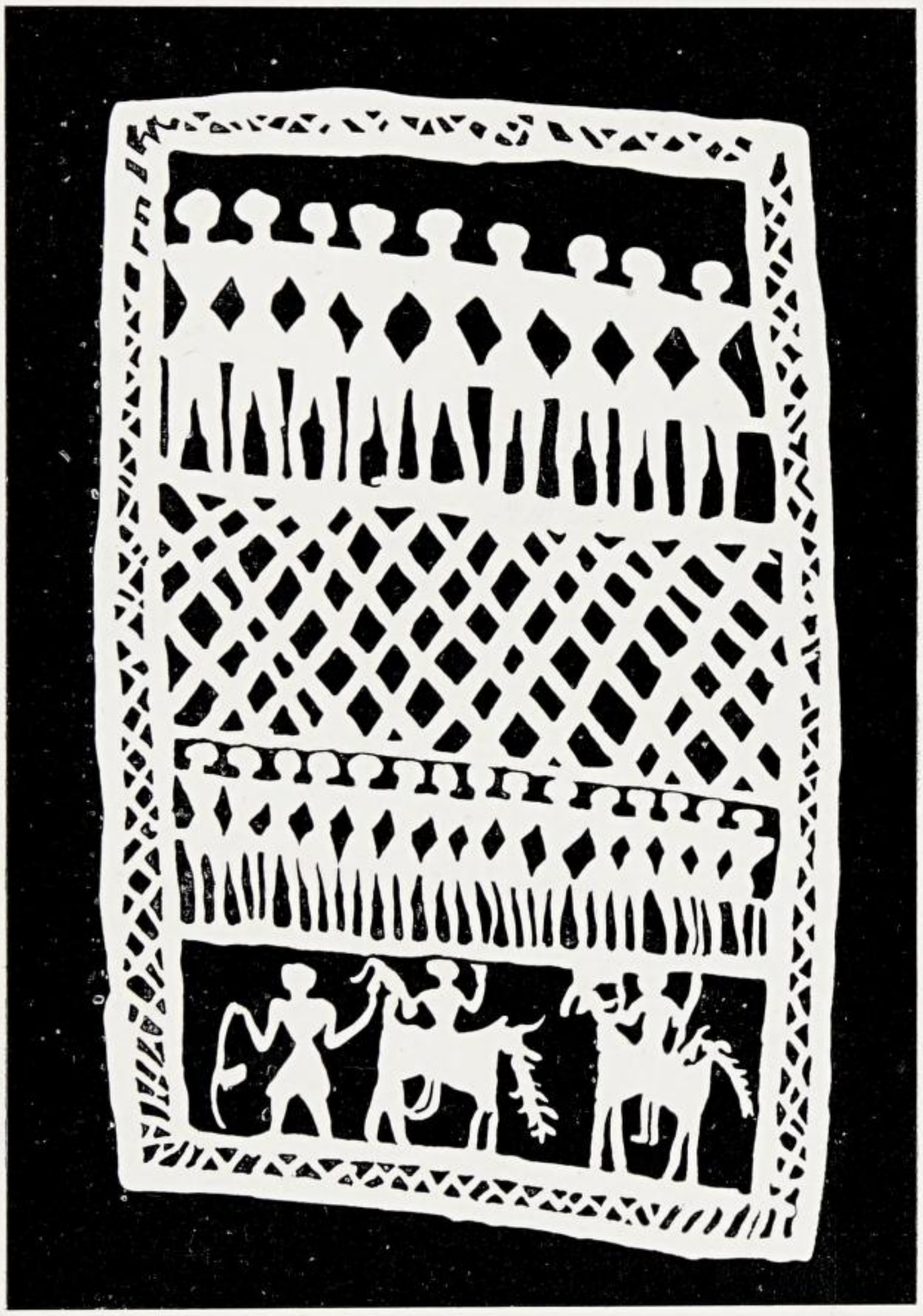


FIG. 137. *An* ittal-*drawing representing in the top row Sahibosum and his friends, and in the lower Mehmsahibosum and her friends; in between is a bed for them to sleep on. In a Saora house at Angda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height,* 36 *inches.*

FIG. 138. *Figure of Sahibosum outside Dokripanga, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 47 inches.*

FIG. 139. *Wooden figures of Sahibosum and his wife outside Karanjaju, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height of taller image, 72 inches.*

FIG. 140. *Wooden figures of Sahibosum and his wife outside Kankaraguda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height,* $39\frac{1}{2}$ *and* $37\frac{1}{2}$ *inches respectively.*

FIG. 141. *Wooden figures of Sahibosum and his wife outside Parisal, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height of taller image,* 36 *inches.*

FIG. 142. *Saora carving on the door of a house at Jasudih, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

XV

The Dance

FOR THE ABORIGINAL the dance is still, in spite of every Puritan attempt to suppress it, an exercise in delight, a display of grace and vigour, a partnership of the sexes in the intimacy of ordered rhythm, an offering to the gods. Much tribal dancing has a serious ritual purpose and there are legends which ascribe its origin to the need of keeping the gods happy and amused. The dance, itself one of the noblest forms of art, has managed to inspire some excellent carving.

The style of the dance varies from tribe to tribe, a fact which is illustrated in the different carvings it inspires. For example, the Saoras' dance is a disorderly and rather drunken procession; individuals prance about in just the manner shown in Fig. 142. The Kond dance in Fig. 144 is a remarkably accurate portrayal of dancing I have myself witnessed in the Machkund Valley; it is a parade rather like the Muria Hulki in which the leader waves a piece of cloth (which is shown in the carving) and the drummers use two kinds of drums, which are clearly distinguished. The Santal dancers in Fig. 143 similarly reflect the vigour and orderliness that characterize the dancing of this great tribe.

The Juang carving (Fig. 146) is from a door in a village dormitory in Keonjhar; the dormitory is, of course, a school of dancing and it is possible that this picture represents one of the pantomimic performances for which the tribe is famous. There are similarly vigorous carvings of individual dancers on Juang combs (Fig. 48). The Santal dance-designs on their marriage litters and musical instruments

(Fig. 148) are carefully and realistically done; the dancers hold hands, beat their drums and move in an ordered line. It is curious that although the Murias have developed the dance more fully perhaps than any other tribe, I cannot recall having seen any drawing or carving of it; the Marias, however, like to have carvings of drummers and dancers in full ceremonial attire on their funerary pillars.

FIG. 143. *Santal carving on a door at Sabaiyya, Santal Parganas, Bihar. Height of taller figure,* $5\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

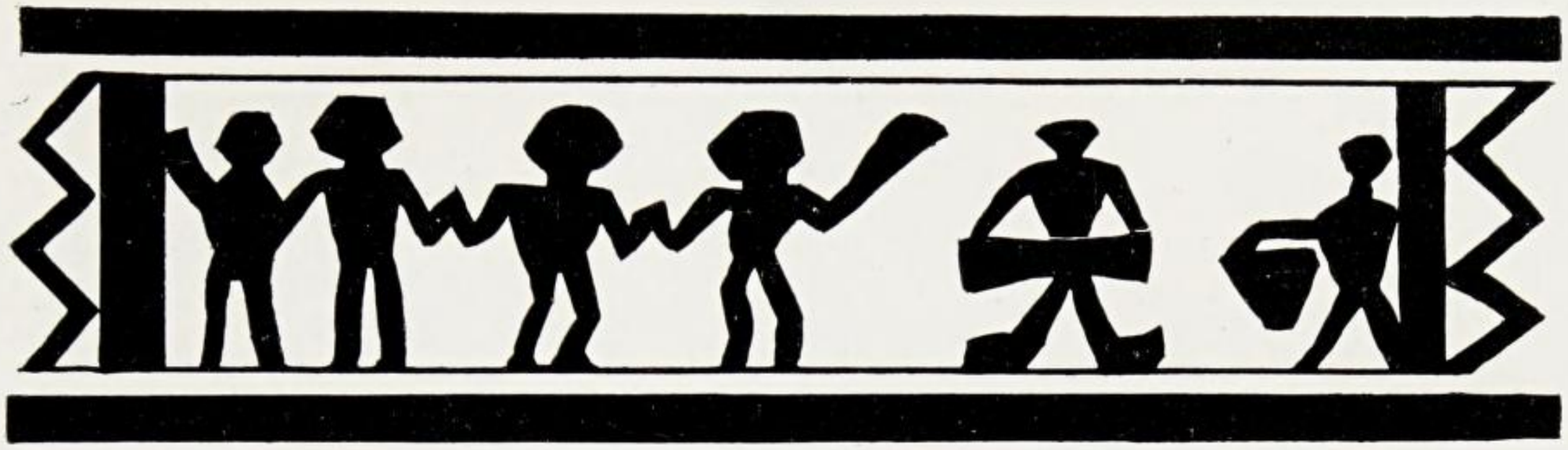


FIG. 144. *Kond carving on a door at Totaguda, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 145. *Kond carving on a door at Jantri, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 146. *Juang carving on a door in the boys' dormitory at Balipal, Keonjhar, Orissa. Length, $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches.*

FIG. 147. *Detail of* FIG. 148.

FIG. 148. *Santal* banam *fiddle from Sabaiyya, Santal Parganas, Orissa. It is carved from a heavy wood,* Grewia tiliaefolia, *darkened with oil and polished. It is carefully carved on all sides. The sound-box is covered with lizard-skin and the single string is made from the intestines of a goat. Total height,* 33 *inches; height of dancers,* $7\frac{3}{4}$ *inches.*

FIG. 149. *Pardhan wall-decoration. Sunpuri, Mandla District, C.P. Height,* 16 *inches.*

XVI

The Mask

It is not easy to discover masks in tribal India, for they are normally only brought out on ceremonial occasions and for some reason the aboriginals are rather shy about them and not very willing to show them to the inquirer. But I think it is safe to say that they can be found among the Gonds, Pardhans and Baigas of the Central Provinces, that they are decidedly rare in Orissa except among the Konds and Bhuiyas and that they are fairly common among the Murias—the constant excitements of dormitory life stimulating the young men to decorate themselves whenever possible. All the masks I have found are of wood or made from gourds; they quickly deteriorate—which adds to their scarcity; the wood is attacked by white ants, the colours fade, the hair and teeth fall out.

Most, perhaps all, of the Muria masks are made for ceremonial dancing expeditions when the youths of a village visit their neighbours. These are occasions for amateur theatricals on such themes as a husband beating his wife (Fig. 154) or thieves robbing an old woman's garden. During a regular dance also the funny man of the party will put on a mask of the type shown in Fig. 156 and will prance round and round the dancers, often with diverting if obscene gestures to relieve the monotony. The Baiga mask (Fig. 150) was made for a children's festival called Chherta and most of the Gond masks were also brought out at this time, though they were displayed at marriages and other occasions when dancing was going on. At the time of Chherta the boys of a village dress up in anything they have and dance round begging from house to house. It is great fun; the children have a feast; the elders make it an excuse for getting drunk. This festival is also kept in Bastar, and here the Muria leader of the dance

is called the Nakta—an opprobious term with a suggestion of sexual impropriety. The Nakta wears a mask, which is generally made out of a gourd, and the anonymity thus achieved greatly stimulates his instinct for horse-play. These masks—I have seen many of them—are of a standardized pattern: two brass rings are put for eyes, a nose is made of beeswax, a slit is cut for the mouth and grains of rice inserted to represent teeth. The hair of a goat or bear is attached as a beard and a tuft of peacock-feathers fixed on the head. I once saw a mask with a small wax bullock set above the nose. As the dancers go through a village the Nakta capers in front of them, and when they return they take him to the nearest stream, roll him in the mud, duck him and make him swallow a bit of bread under water.

I only once saw masks in the Bison-horn Maria country; they are illustrated in Fig. 164. They were painted with red and black lines and liberally decorated with bear's hair. But I was told later that the custom of making these masks had been abandoned, and for a rather curious reason. In 1940 I saw a little girl at Mokhpal with one side of her face covered with a growth of hair. It was generally believed that she was the reincarnation of a bear. The young men there told me that they had had masks decorated with bear's hair, but that word had gone round that anyone who wore these masks might be reborn as a 'bear-incarnation', not actually as a bear but at least with embarrassingly ursine embellishments. All the masks, therefore, were destroyed.

FIG. 150. *Baiga masked dancer engaged in a Chherta dance. Pandpur, Mandla District, C.P.*

The Mask

The Bhuiya masks (Figs. 152 and 153) were connected with hunting. On a Sunday near the full moon of Chait (April-May), Kalya Deo and Durga Deo come upon two unmarried Bhuiya youths and inspire them to dress up. They put on masks and ornaments, and dance. While they are dancing, the bystanders ask them whether the annual ceremonial hunt (held everywhere at this season) will be successful or no; if the boys reply favourably, a party sets out for the forest. The masked boys also have the task of choosing the leader of the hunt, who has to worship the bows and arrows before they are used and leads the way into the forest.

The Kond masks (Fig. 157) are of special interest, for they form a link with the old days of Meriah (human) sacrifice. When this practice was stopped in the middle of the last century, the Konds preserved many relics of a duty which they believed had divine sanction behind it. Many kept the old knives and iron chains and bowls which were used in those savage rites; some were able to preserve little bits of human flesh in bamboo tubes; others, more lucky, cherished human skulls. Some of these remain to this day, and the Konds say that at every full moon they can be heard weeping for human blood. In those villages that were fortunate enough to possess a human skull, the priests kept it in regular use; when they sacrificed the substitute and inadequate buffalo (which was all that Government permitted), they used to place the skull in front of the stone symbols of the Earth Mother. But in time the skulls got damaged or destroyed by fire or stolen and the custom was abandoned. But then when the priest tried to kill the buffalo—so I was told—the axe would not even break the skin. A Kuttia Kond priest then had a dream in which the Earth Mother declared, 'The head is destroyed; make a new head in its place. Sacrifice, dance, and then kill the buffalo. Then, and only then, will I be pleased and accept your offering.' Accordingly the Konds made a mask after the pattern

shown in the dream and next day the festival was celebrated without a hitch. Ever since then masks have been made and, at the time of the buffalo-sacrifice which the Konds still call Meriah, one of them is offered to the Earth Mother, a fowl is killed above it and the villagers dance, the children waving branches in the air, and it is believed that the goddess is satisfied (Fig. 158).

Some of the Mandla masks appear to be caricatures of Hindu ascetics, always fair game for the shrewd and rational aboriginal. From time to time the tribesmen of this area—Gonds, Pardhans, Baigas, Agarias—celebrate a complicated rite called the Laru Kaj, of which the central incident is the sacrifice of a pig. At the end of the ceremony an aboriginal dressed up as a sadhu comes in to beg. He wears a mask (if he can get one), smears his body with ash, and carries a trident and begging-bowl. His fellows greet him with ribald cries and offer him pork and liquor, which he refuses in pretended disgust. The masks illustrated in Figs. 151 and 160 were made for this rite; they have the lean and hungry look of the ascetic and wear the characteristic mark on the forehead.

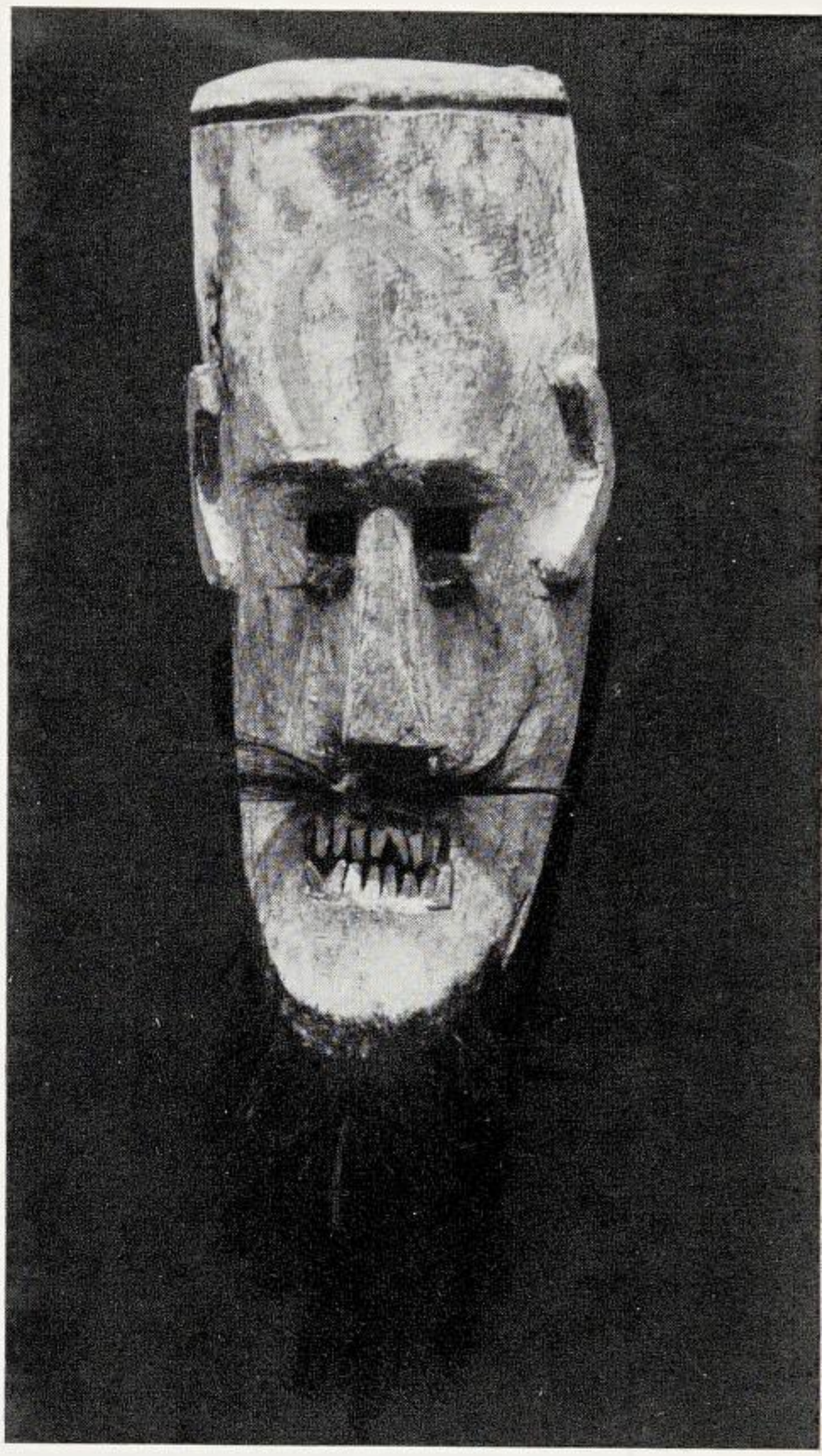


FIG. 151. *Baiga mask parodying a Hindu ascetic. It is made of a curved piece of* Pterocarpus marsupium *wood—the curve gives the face a strongly projecting chin. Beard and eyebrows are of horse-hair; there is a red sect-mark on the forehead. Height,* 20 *inches.*

Other Gond masks are regarded as representing demons or Rakshasas. The legend about them goes back to the conflict between Krishna and his wicked uncle Kans. According to Gond (which often differs from Puranic) mythology, when the Raja heard about

Krishna's sport with the milkmaids, he sent his Rakshasas to stop it. They arrived and found the divine hero playing his flute and the seven hundred maidens dancing round him. The Rakshasas joined in the dance and their ugly and deformed faces greatly amused the girls. But when Krishna saw his enemies he cut off their heads and they ran back to Raja Kans without them. The Raja sent more, and more, Rakshasas, and Krishna beheaded them all, until the milkmaids, sorry to see such amusing creatures destroyed, came to him and begged him to restore them to ordinary life. This he refused to do, but he promised that in the future Kali Yug the decapitated heads would be used for the entertainment of mankind. 'For this reason,' say the Gonds, 'boys put on masks and dance with girls in memory of the Rakshasas and the milkmaids.'

Most of the Gond and Baiga masks are of a similar general pattern; they are big and often heavy, much larger than the Muria or Bhuiya masks, and are attached to the head by a cord passing through two or four holes cut in the back. A suitable block of wood is carefully hollowed out and the front is shaped to allow a fairly prominent nose and some indication of ears. Mouths and eyes are cut through, the mouth being often square or rectangular. The nostrils also are sometimes hollowed out. The wood is then whitened with clay and, when this has dried, patterns are traced in black or red. Occasionally, instead of a white, there is a black or red background. Teeth are made of grains of rice, seeds from a gourd, bits of wood or even scraps of broken glass; in one mask a realistic effect is gained by a distinction in the shape of the front teeth and the molars. Hair is attached with beeswax and almost any available hair is used—from the horse, cow or goat—though bear's hair is preferred. If hair is not affixed, lines are drawn over the top of the head or below the nose to suggest it.

There was a special fashion in Gond and Baiga villages of Mandla District in 1946, where many masks were made and decorated in

pictographic style (Figs. 159 and 162). Tigers, birds, snakes, centipedes and trees were drawn on the cheeks and foreheads of the masks, but these did not seem to have any special meaning or to be connected with a story; their purpose was apparently purely decorative.

FIGS. 152-3. *Bhuiya masks worn for divination before the annual ceremonial hunt. Both masks are of* Trewia nudiflora *wood and are blackened with oil. They have eye-slits but no aperture for the mouth, though in* FIG. 153 *there is an attempt to suggest teeth. Both are* $11\frac{1}{4}$ *inches high. Bonai, Orissa.*

FIG. 154. *Muria masked dancers on a Chait Dandar expedition. Kachora, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*

FIG. 156. OPPOSITE. *Mask used by the Murias in the Chherta and Pus Kolang dances. It is carved from* Trewia nudiflora *wood; the teeth and eyes are of bell-metal; the head and chin are covered with bear's hair. The nostrils are hollow and the ears are pierced for ornaments. Height,* 12½ *inches. Berma, Kondagaon Tahsil, Bastar.*

FIG. 155. *Muria jester called the Nakta wearing a mask at the Chherta festival. The mask is made from a gourd, with nose of beeswax, teeth of gourd-seeds and a turban of red cloth.*

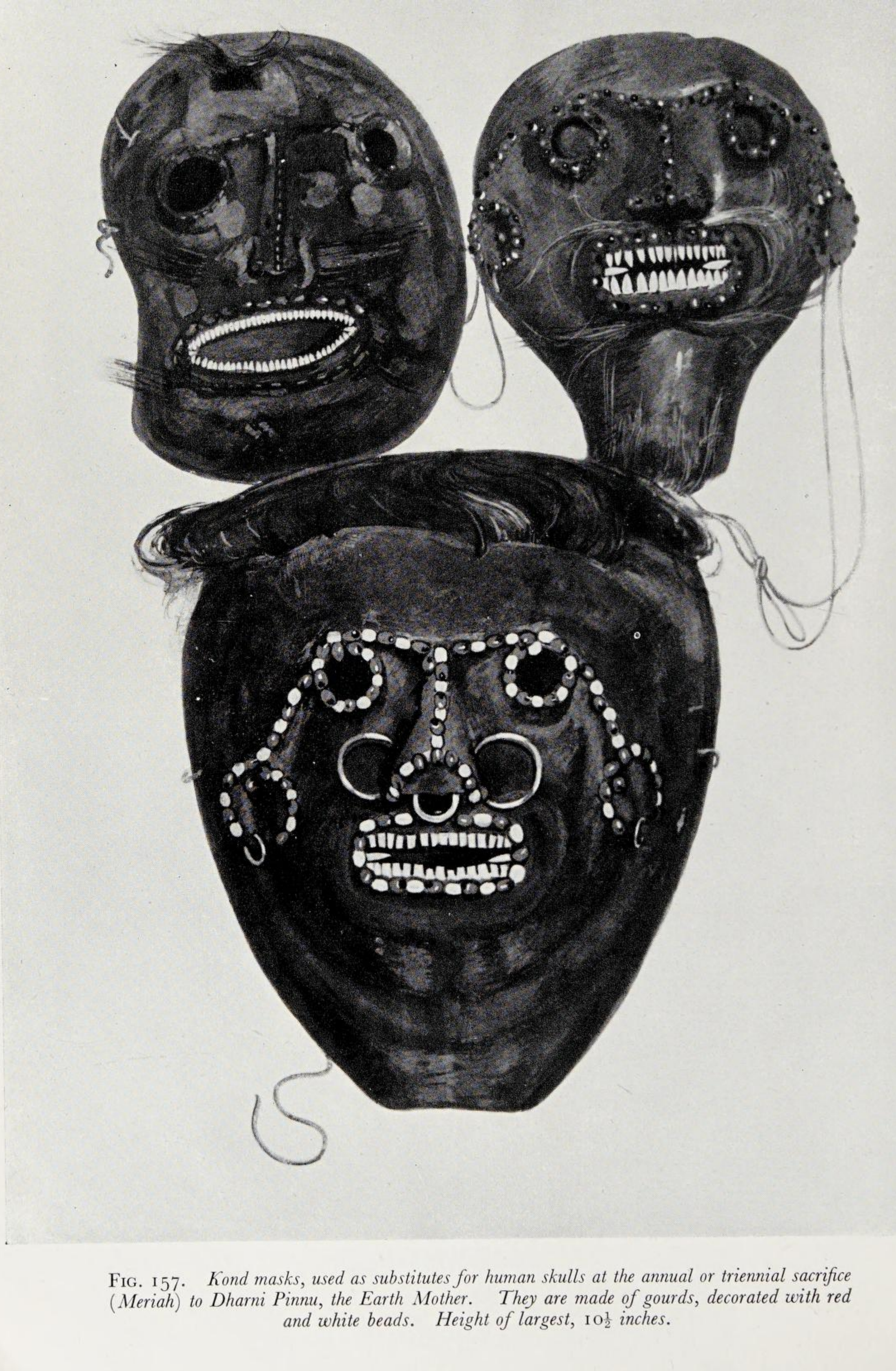


FIG. 157. *Kond masks, used as substitutes for human skulls at the annual or triennial sacrifice (Meriah) to Dharni Pinnu, the Earth Mother. They are made of gourds, decorated with red and white beads. Height of largest,* $10\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

FIG. 158. *Kuttia Kond priests, Litu and Porna, sacrifice a fowl above masks representing human skulls which are placed in front of the stone symbols of the Earth Mother to whom human sacrifice was formerly offered. Surangbaro, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

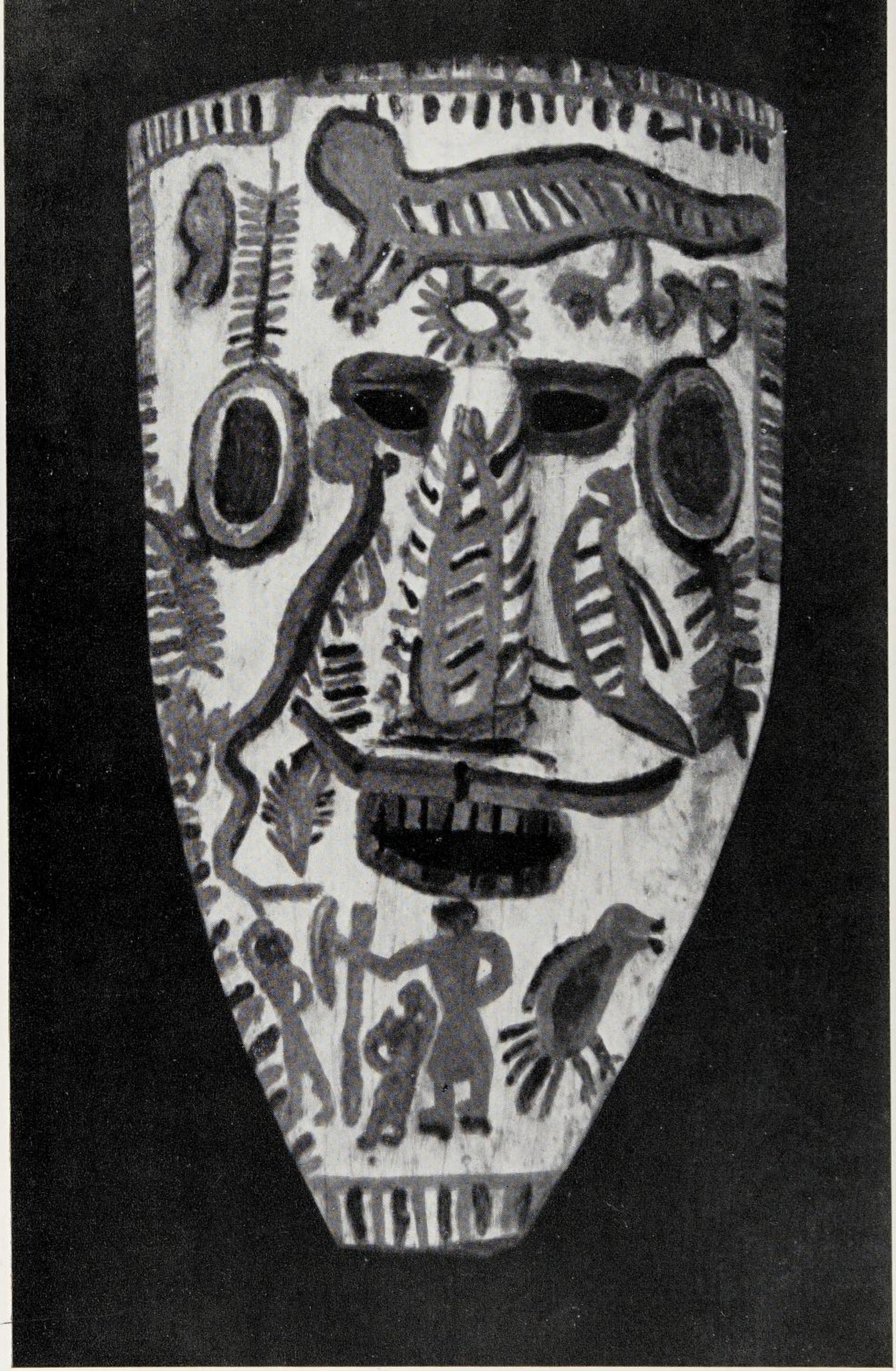


FIG. 159. *Baiga pictographic mask from Pandpur, Mandla District, C.P. Made of* Shorea robusta *wood, 21½ inches high, decorated with red and black designs on a white background.*

FIG. 160. *Gond mask caricaturing a Hindu ascetic. It is made of* Boswellia serrata *wood, whitened with clay and decorated with red and black bands. The hair is of hemp. Mandla District, C.P. Height,* 19½ *inches.*

FIG. 161. *Gond Rakshasa mask. It is made of* Trewia nudiflora *wood. There is a large slit for mouth, but no eye or other holes and no hair. The nose is very depressed. The face is coloured with yellow earth, and moustaches are painted with coal-dust. The teeth are wooden and the upper ones are reddened. Mandla District, C.P. Height,* $15\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

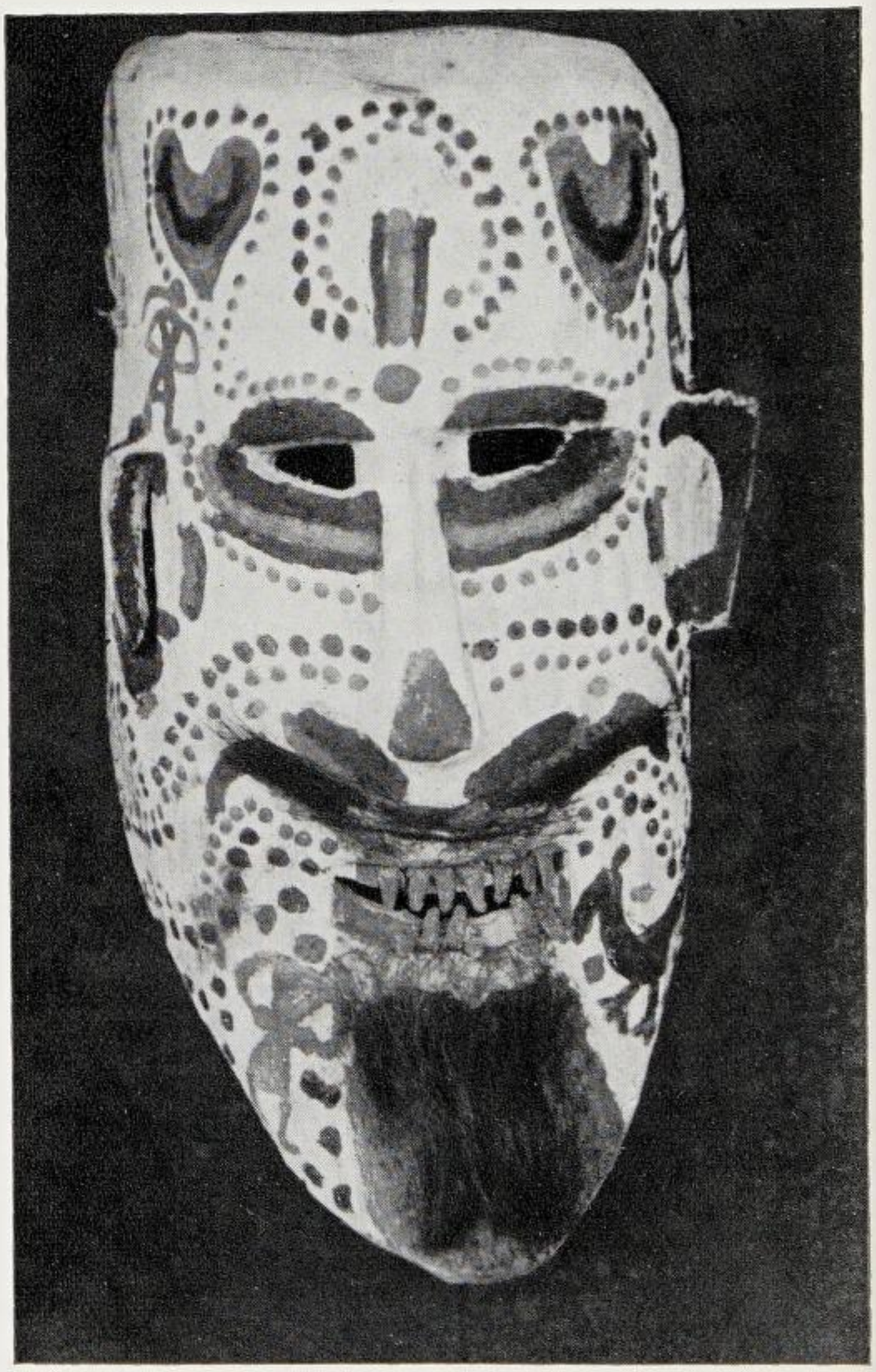


FIG. 162. *Gond pictographic mask from Sunpuri, Mandla District, C.P. The maker is fond of drawing similar designs on the walls of his house. The mask is made of* Cedrela toona *wood, and has a beard and moustache of black horse-hair, with teeth of gourd seeds. The designs are in red and black on a white background. Height,* $20\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

FIG. 163. *Pardhan Rakshasa mask, made of a long pointed piece of* Trewia nudiflora *wood. It is coloured black and red, and has beard, moustache and tuft of horse-hair. The mouth is rectangular, the eyes square; the ears are large and project* 1½ *inches. The teeth are large gourd seeds. Mandla District, C.P. Height,* 31 *inches.*

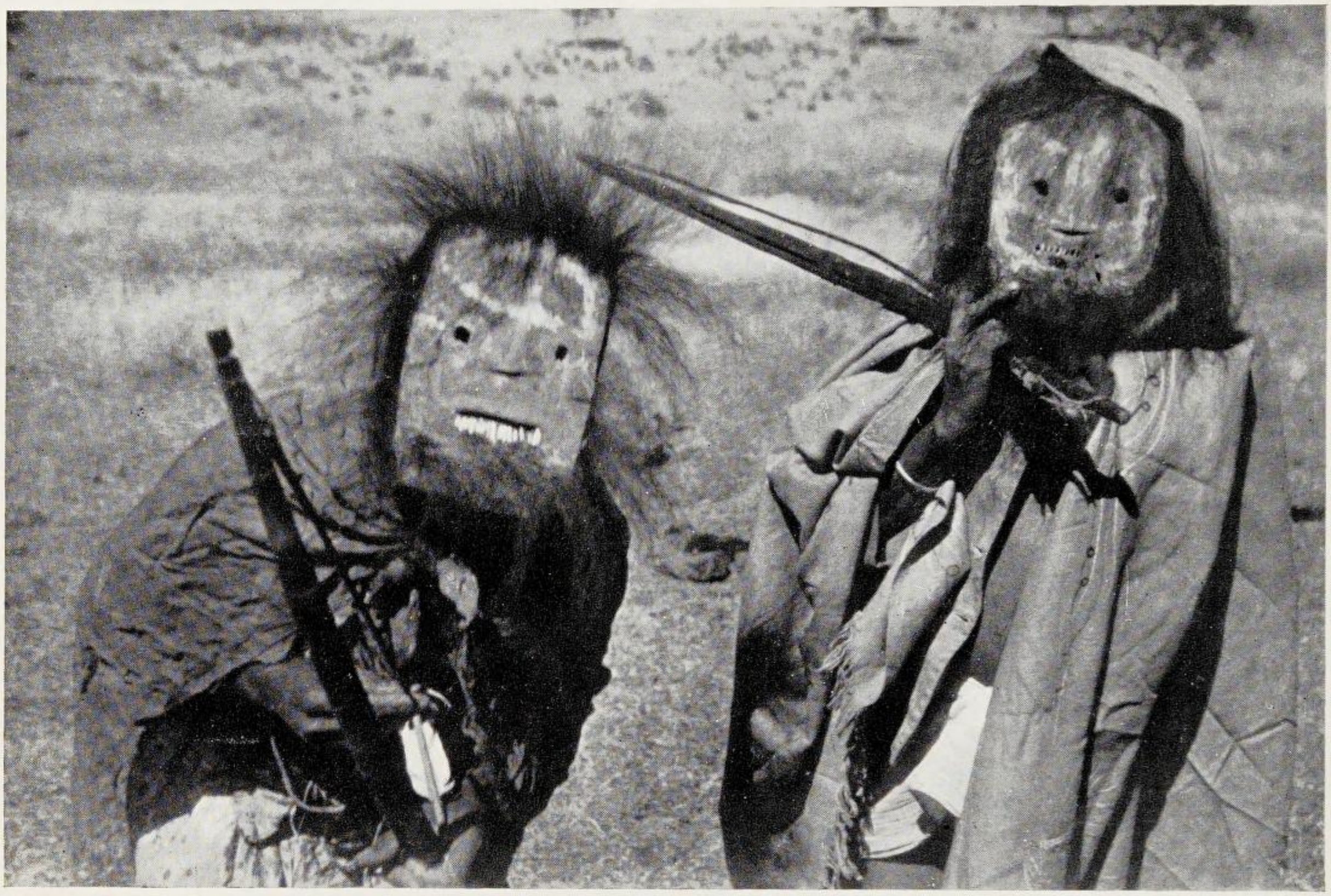


FIG. 164. *Bison-horn Maria masked dancers at Surnar, Dantewara Tahsil, Bastar. The masks are decorated with red and white patterns and covered with bear's hair. Height,* $9\frac{3}{4}$ *and* 9 *inches respectively.*

FIG. 165. *Saora wood-carving from Jasudih, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

XVII

The Peacock

PEACOCK FEATHERS have been used for decorative purposes in India from classical times; they were worn by Krishna and appear as part of the insignia of kings. They are also a powerful demon-scarer and, smoked in a pipe, can be used as a charm against snake-bite. The peacock's abundant fertility makes it a useful fertility symbol and it is sometimes drawn on grain-bins to improve the value of the seed (Fig. 166). The bird is in fact venerated and its feathers are used by aboriginals (as well, of course, as by many Hindus) in every part of our area; the shaman waves a bunch of the feathers as he falls into trance before his shrine, the amorous gallant decorates his head-dress with them as he goes to the dance, girls stick them into their hair. For the primitive artist the peacock feather has several advantages; it looks beautiful, it suggests an almost regal dignity and importance, it is vaguely lucky, and it is comparatively accessible.

Although the Konds have a peacock totem and sometimes carve the bird on their doors (Fig. 169), it is the Saoras who have given it, artistically, the most attention. According to a Saora legend there was once a hero whose flowing hair shone and sparkled like the lightning. One day he went to the forest to make a plough and his hair kept blowing into his eyes and distracting him. Impatiently he pulled it out and threw it away and it became the first peacock's tail. Another story connects the bird with the old motif of the flying elephants. Long ago, it is said, elephants had four great wings and

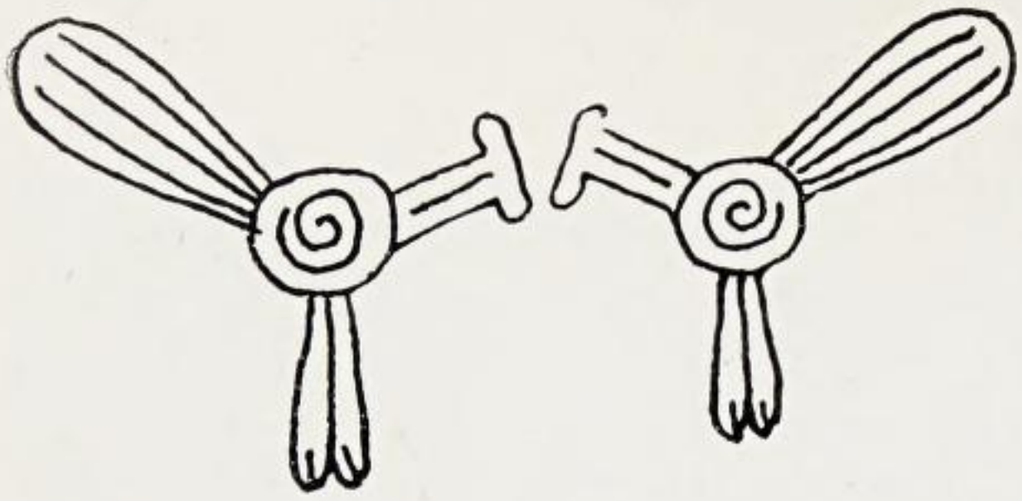
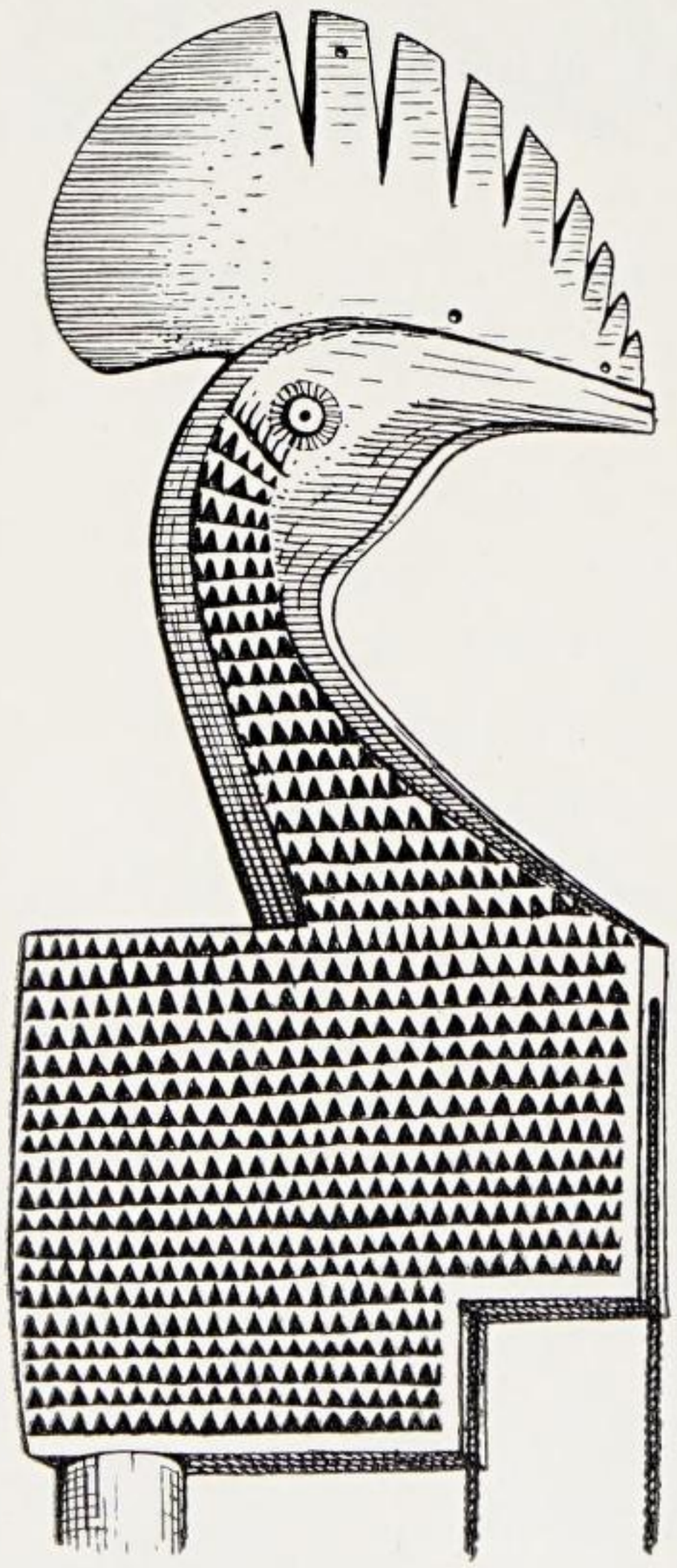


Fig. 166. *Two peacocks modelled in clay on a grain-bin in Central India.*

the gods flew on them about the world. But after a time, when the human population increased in numbers, the flying elephants proved rather a nuisance; they used to make a great deal of noise, for as they flew up into the sky they crowed like cocks; when they were tired they would perch on the roofs of houses which as often as not would collapse under the weight. So at last the Supreme Being cut off the wings and gave one pair to the peacock for a tail and the other pair to the plantain tree to make great leaves.

There is, unfortunately, no record of these exciting incidents in the Saora pictographs, but the stories reveal the interest and importance that the bird has for the Saora mind. The peacock is in fact closely connected with religious practice and especially with the cult of the Dead. At the *Karja*, the great triennial ceremony for the Departed, the Saoras hunt and kill a peacock, remove the flesh, stuff the skin with straw, stick it on a long pole and then dance with it round the village, finally depositing it among the funerary menhirs.

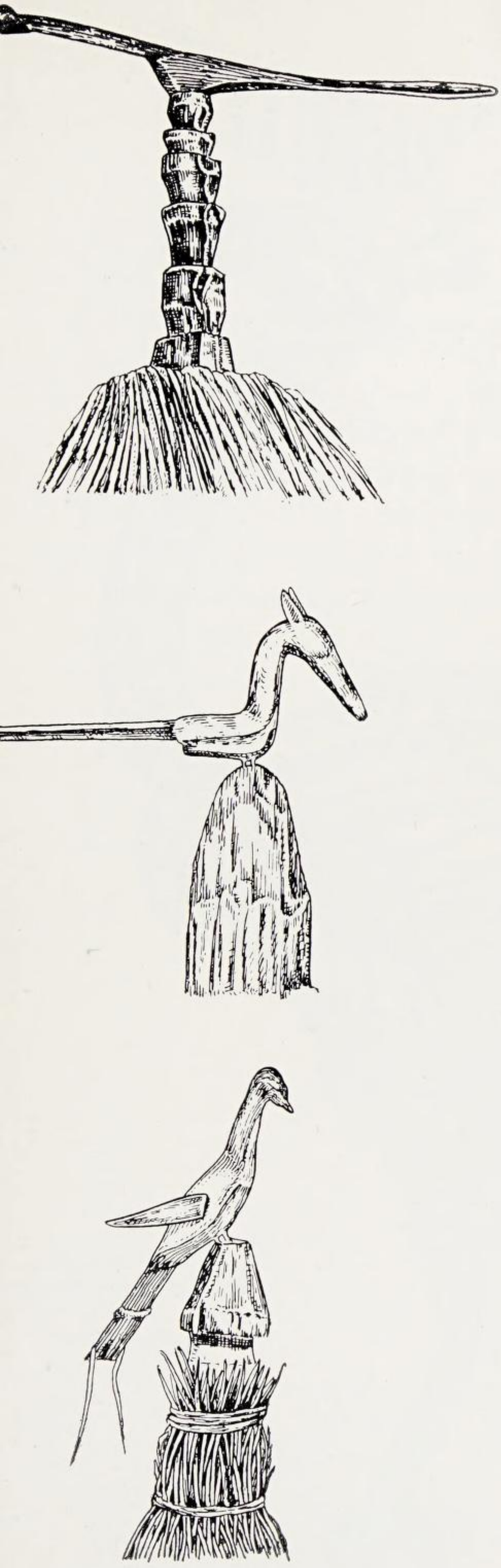


The Saoras also carve peacocks' heads on the stringed instrument which they call *kuranrajan* (Fig. 172). This instrument is used by the shamans for divination; its quiet music and the rhythmic singing that accompanies it assist the attainment of a state of trance when the diviner passes, as he believes, into communication with the ancestral Dead and the gods.

In all Hill Saora villages will be found little shrines rather like dovecotes. They are called *sadru* and are erected in honour of the gods or the

Fig. 167. *Carved peacock usually found on the* kuranrajan *instruments. Height, 7 inches.*

Fig. 168. Opposite. *Wooden peacocks from the spires of* sadru-*shrines in villages of Ganjam District, Orissa. The Saoras associate this bird with the Dead and generally place it as chowkidar or watchman of a shrine. The birds average* 18 *inches in length from beak to tail.*



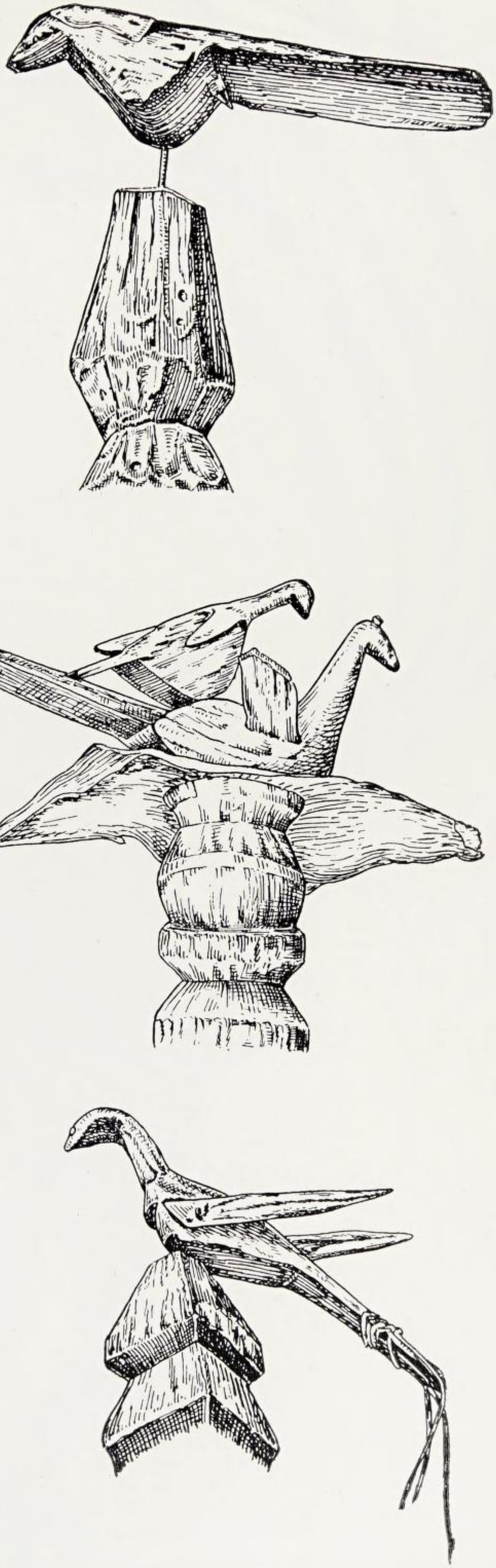


FIG. 168

FIG. 169. *Kond carving on a door of a house at Totaguda, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 170. *Peacocks carved on the door of a Saora house at Mandidi, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

Dead. An orthodox shrine should have a small wooden spire rising above the circular thatched roof and on the spire a roughly carved image of a peacock, which is considered to be the watchman and guardian. These peacocks (Fig. 168) are often very crudely fashioned; sometimes the Saoras are content with a bit of wood that looks in its natural shape something like a bird; sometimes the wood is given a head and tail; occasionally the thing is done more elaborately, as where a male bird is shown covering a female—an unusual motif for an aboriginal shrine.

The association of the bird with the Dead runs through all these uses; it is worth noting that Jaliyasum, a malicious deity who is known as the messenger of the god of death, is represented by a bunch of peacock-feathers.

FIG. 171. *Santal carving of a peacock on the door of a house at Kadwa, Santal Parganas, Bihar. Actual size.*

FIG. 172. *Hill Saora shaman divining with the help of the instrument called* kuranrajan. *Talajingi, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

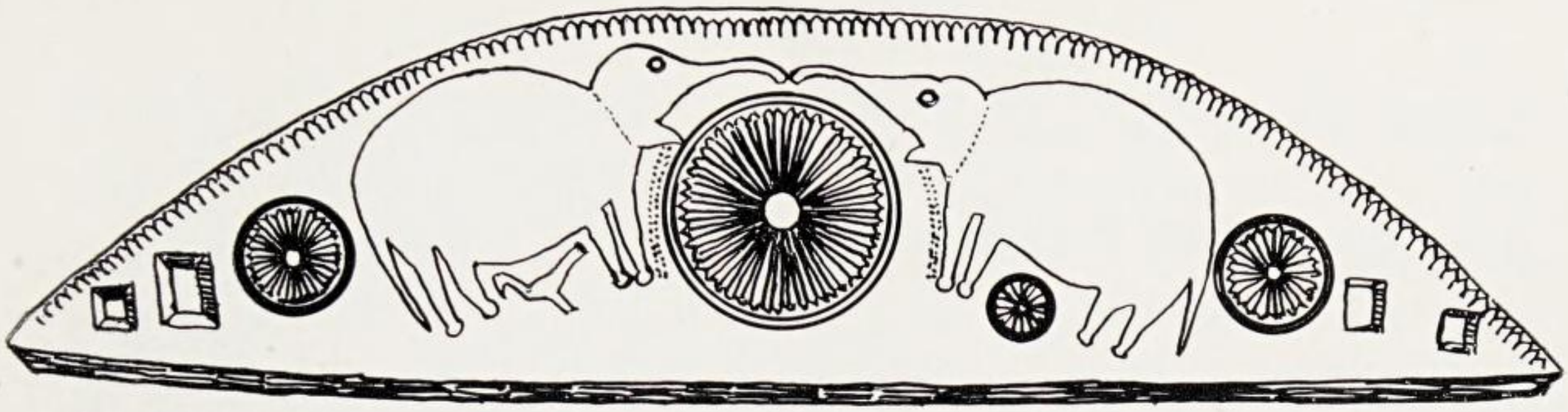


FIG. 173. *Lintel of a door from Mandidi, Ganjam District, Orissa, a Saora village under Kond influence. Length, 30 inches.*

XVIII

The Elephant

IN INDIA THE ELEPHANT has always been regarded as lucky and sacred. It is the mount of gods, it brings victory to kings. The elephant-headed Ganesh is the giver of perfection. Indra, lord of the sky, mounts the white elephant Airavata. In the Jataka literature Buddha himself is represented as a white elephant. In ancient India the animal was so sacred that Kautilya prescribed the death-sentence for anyone who killed it. On the other hand, if a man was killed by an elephant his relatives had to pay a special tax to Government for such an auspicious death.

The very early *Hastyayurveda* gives some interesting details about the origin of elephants. Formerly they could fly. But one day a flock of elephants perched on a tree near the hermitage of a holy man and broke it. The sage in anger cursed them to be henceforth the mounts of men. The elephants went to Brahma, who was powerless to reverse the decree but promised to create an elephant-doctor who would help them. As the elephants, morose, unhappy, earth-bound, wandered across the world, they entered another sage's hermitage. During the night he got up and passed urine; one of the she-elephants drank it;

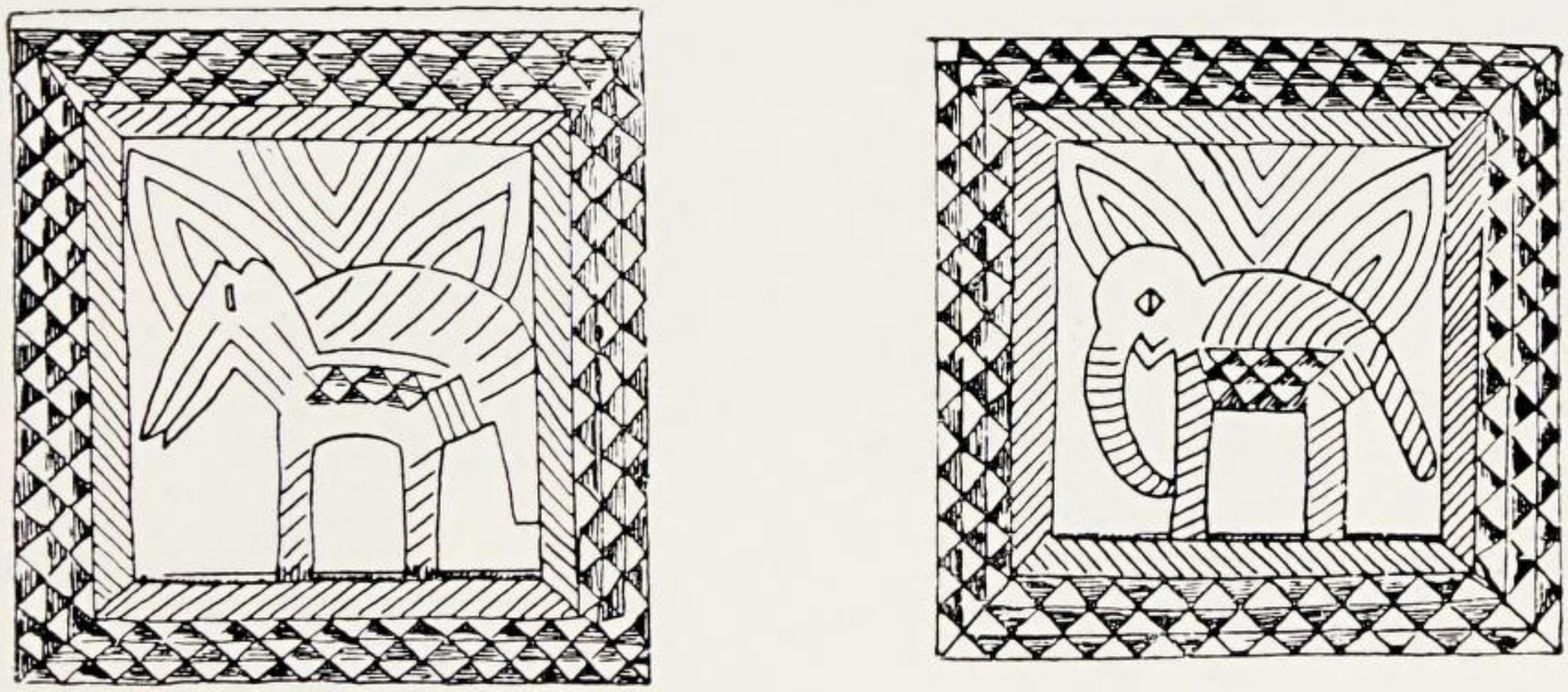
she was impregnated and in due time gave birth to a beautiful child who grew up to be Palakapya, the first doctor of elephants. The tradition of the flying elephants has passed into tribal mythology and there are many stories of how their wings were lost. The Konds declare that when Captain McPherson, who was one of the officers responsible for suppressing human sacrifice in the middle of the last century, visited their country he was mounted on a flying elephant.

The elephant is a common figure in Indian poetry for, as F. H. Andrews points out, the Eastern poet finds in this splendid animal his synonyms for the superlative of strength, grace and symmetry. 'The soft and graceful gait of an Indian woman is likened to that of an elephant; and in the East where a woman's garments permit freedom of movement and sympathetic co-operation of the muscular system this is an apt comparison. The divinely exquisite Sita possessed "thighs like the trunks of elephants". And the lord himself, the Rakshasa god, Rawan, although an evil person addicted to wine and very quarrelsome, was still godlike in the majesty of his form, and he had "fingers like the trunks of elephants".'

In architectural sculpture and mural decoration also the image of the elephant is constantly employed. 'Nowhere in the world', says Andrews in an admirable account of 'The Elephant in Industry and Art' (*The Journal of Indian Art*, Vol. X), 'has he been drawn and chiselled with such fidelity and expressiveness. He romps and runs, wrestles and hunts, plays and prays; is a jolly companion amongst men and monkeys; is propriety itself when assisting in tableaux with the gods; and is altogether a big, good-tempered and useful member of the community and a true elephant all the time.' And again: 'The position of the elephant in regard to art is one of considerable importance. *In propria persona* he is an imposing and highly decorative figure in pageants. Pictorially he figures constantly, in all ages, in both sculptures and painting; architecturally he is variously a telamon,

a cantilever, a finial and so on; and in the ivory he furnishes he exercises universal decorative influence.'

So, too, in modern tribal India, the elephant is modelled on walls, carved on doors and even moulded as a finial. There may be a vague belief that such representations are lucky—for the elephant is a symbol of wealth and Ganesh, with whom it is associated, is the god of luck—but even more important is the sheer delight that the people take in everything to do with this charming and amiable creature. On the whole, the pictures in this section are not unworthy of the great tradition of elephant-art; most of them are drawn with vigour and each has its distinctive character.



FIGS. 174-5. *Winged elephants, probably with a mythological reference, carved on a Baiga door at Lamni, Bilaspur District, C.P.*

FIG. 176. *Saora wood-carving from Sukulipada, Ganjam District, Orissa. Width,* $7\frac{1}{2}$ *inches.*

FIG. 177. *Carving on the door of a Saora house at Sukulipada, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

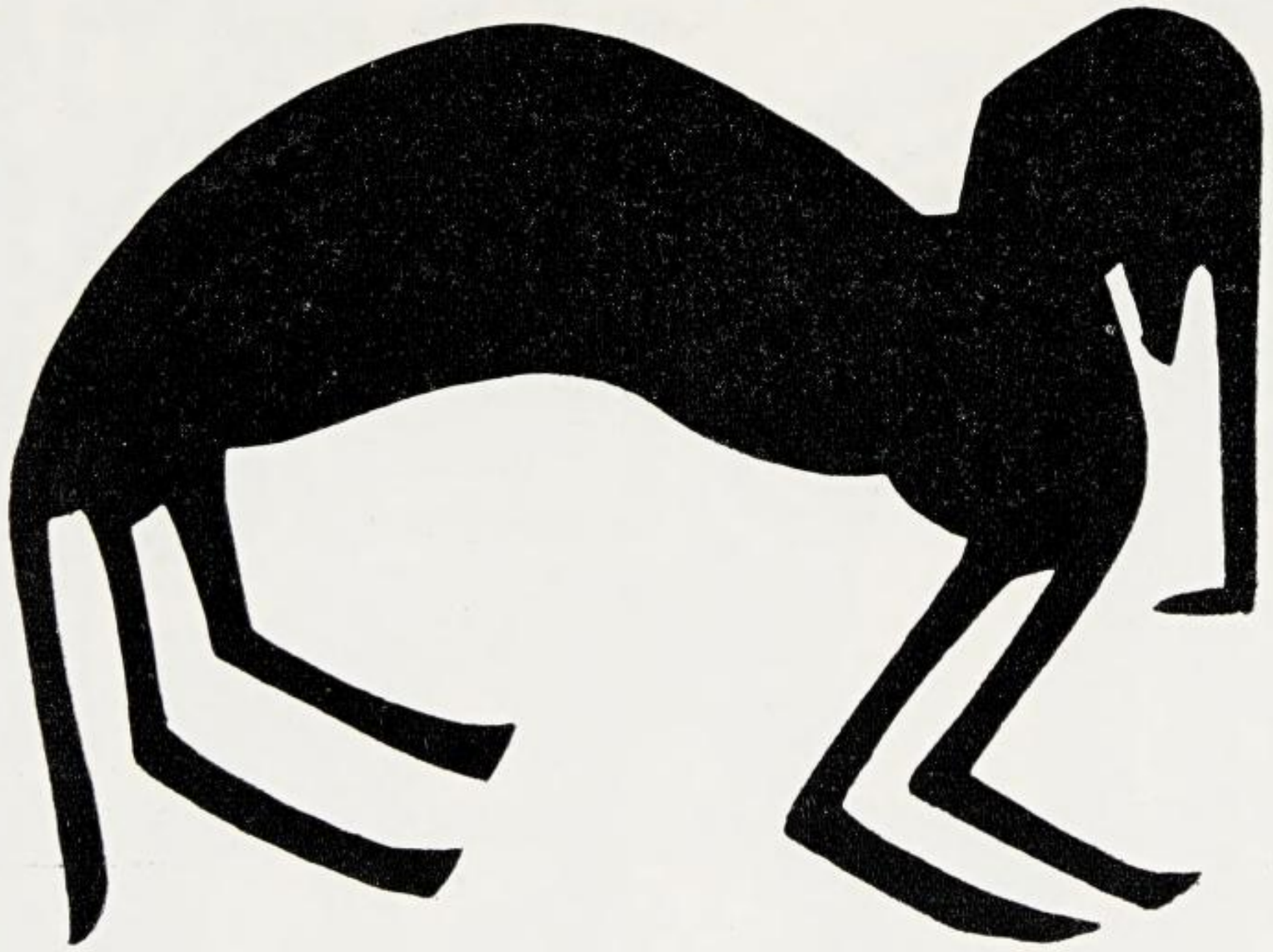


FIG. 178. *Carving on the door of a Saora house at Dariambo, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

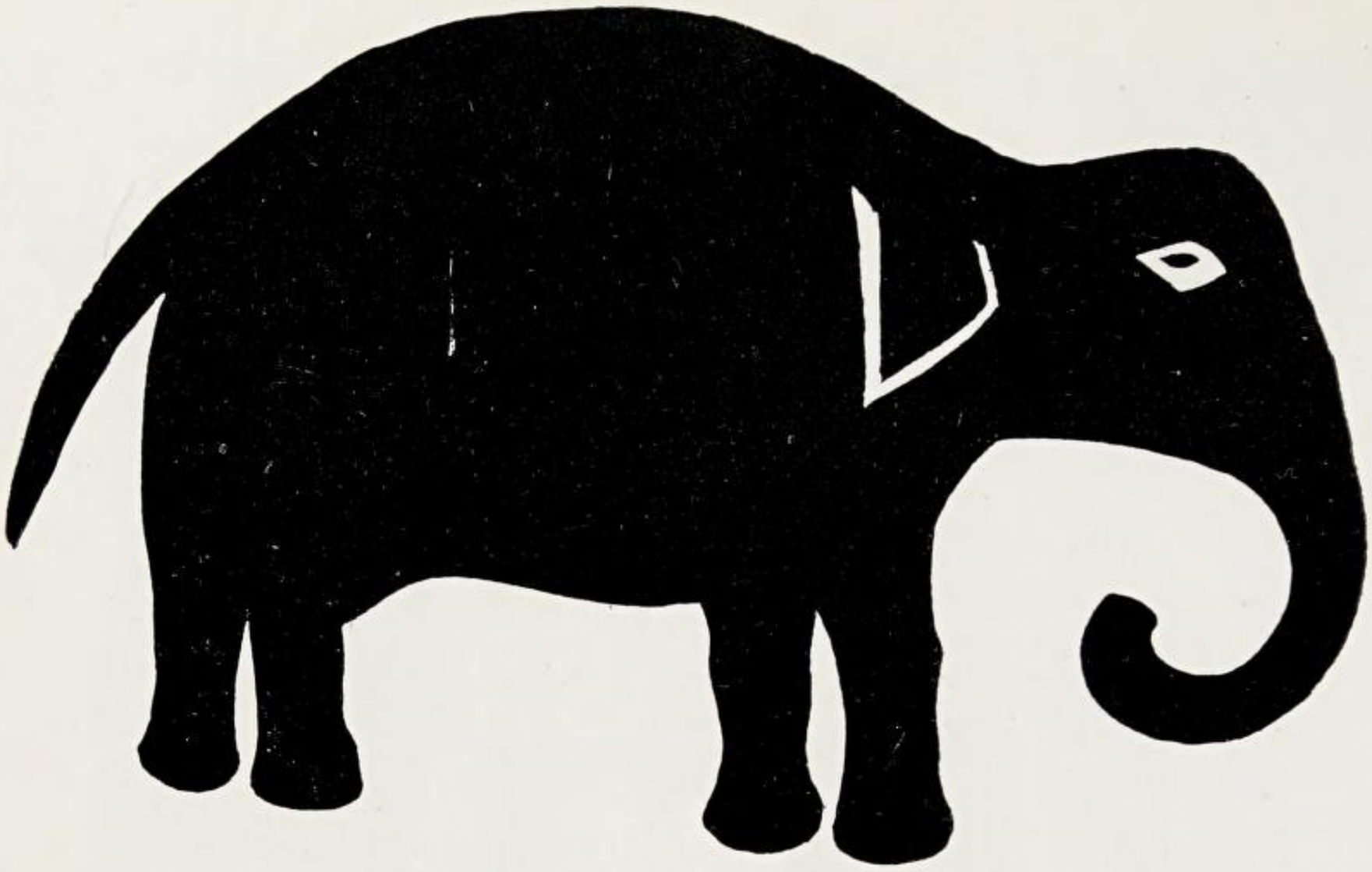


FIG. 179. *Carving on the door of a Bondo house at Kadamguda, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 180. *Carving on the door of a Saora house at Buraduguda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

The Hunt

FIG. 181. *Panel of a Kond door at Totaguda, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

XIX

The Hunt

THE HUNT, especially the ceremonial hunt, continues wherever it is permitted. It has been driven in disgrace from the forests of the Central Provinces, but it still survives in the more liberal atmosphere of Bastar and Orissa. In the hunt the tribesman escapes from the tiresome round of conventional agriculture and returns to the world of yesterday. He escapes back into an age when nature, unstimulated, gave a small population enough to go round, when meat was plentiful and there was variety and excitement in one's life. For the pre-literate the hunt is a surrogate for cinema, detective thriller and religious adventure. For beside giving food and excitement, the hunt is an important exercise in magic and religion; on its success before sowing the seed depends the harvest; failure with the bow means failure also with the plough.

Hunting scenes, therefore, are popular everywhere, though I have not found them, naturally enough, among the culturally emasculated tribesmen of the Central Provinces. On the whole, the primitive artists do them very well. The Santals have an excellent wild boar (Fig. 184). The Muria carving reproduced as Fig. 186 is rather mysterious; it is probably a drive for birds. The old Census number-board which I found hanging in a Muria dormitory (Fig. 182) has a couple of fine deer with spirited horns. The Kond hunt in Fig. 181 is full of vigour and the tiger (which is but rarely depicted in these pictures, possibly for magical reasons) is delightful. By comparison the Juang carving (Fig. 192) is tame, and not only tame but inaccurate; this bowman could not possibly shoot his arrow. The other Kond carvings are good, especially those of the deer in Figs. 185 and 187,

and there is a charming portrayal of a successful hunter (Fig. 189) dancing with joy at the conclusion of a hunt.

It has been suggested that these carvings and drawings are intended, on the principles of sympathetic magic, to promote success in the chase; the making of pictures of birds and animals at home will make it easier to find them in the forest. It may be so, but I have been unable to verify the fact in the field. On the whole, I think that the pictures are simply decorative, though there may be a vague idea that they bring good luck.

FIG. 182. *Drawing, in charcoal, on an old Census number-board, at Baghbeda, Bastar.*

It is interesting to compare with them a hunting-scene (Fig. 188) from the Singanpur Cave to the north-west of Raigarh (in the very centre of our area) which was discovered and recorded by C. W. Anderson in 1910. The boar is very well done and the whole picture reveals an enthusiasm and delight which shows that ancient man in this region was not very dissimilar from his modern representative.

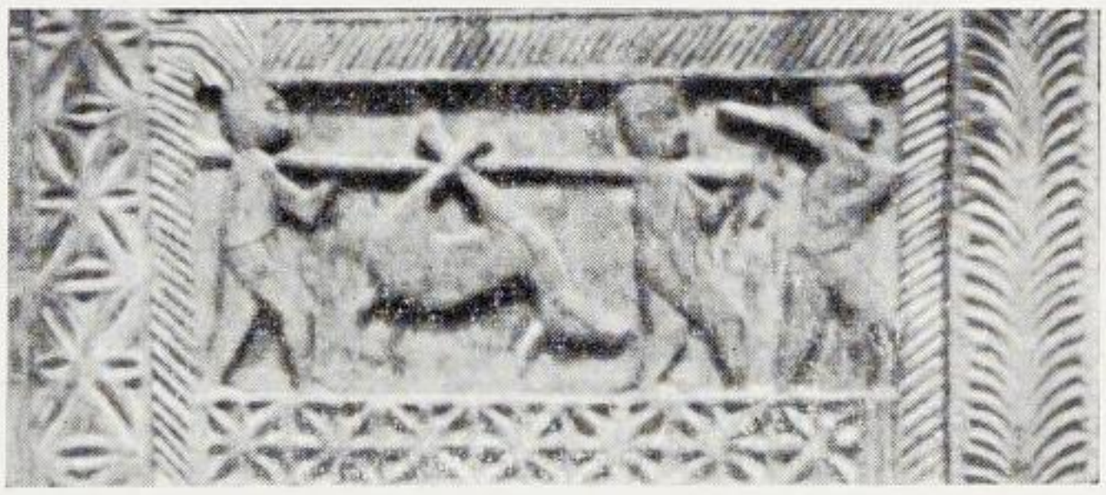


FIG. 183. *Wood-carving of hunters carrying home a deer, from a Santal marriage-litter.*

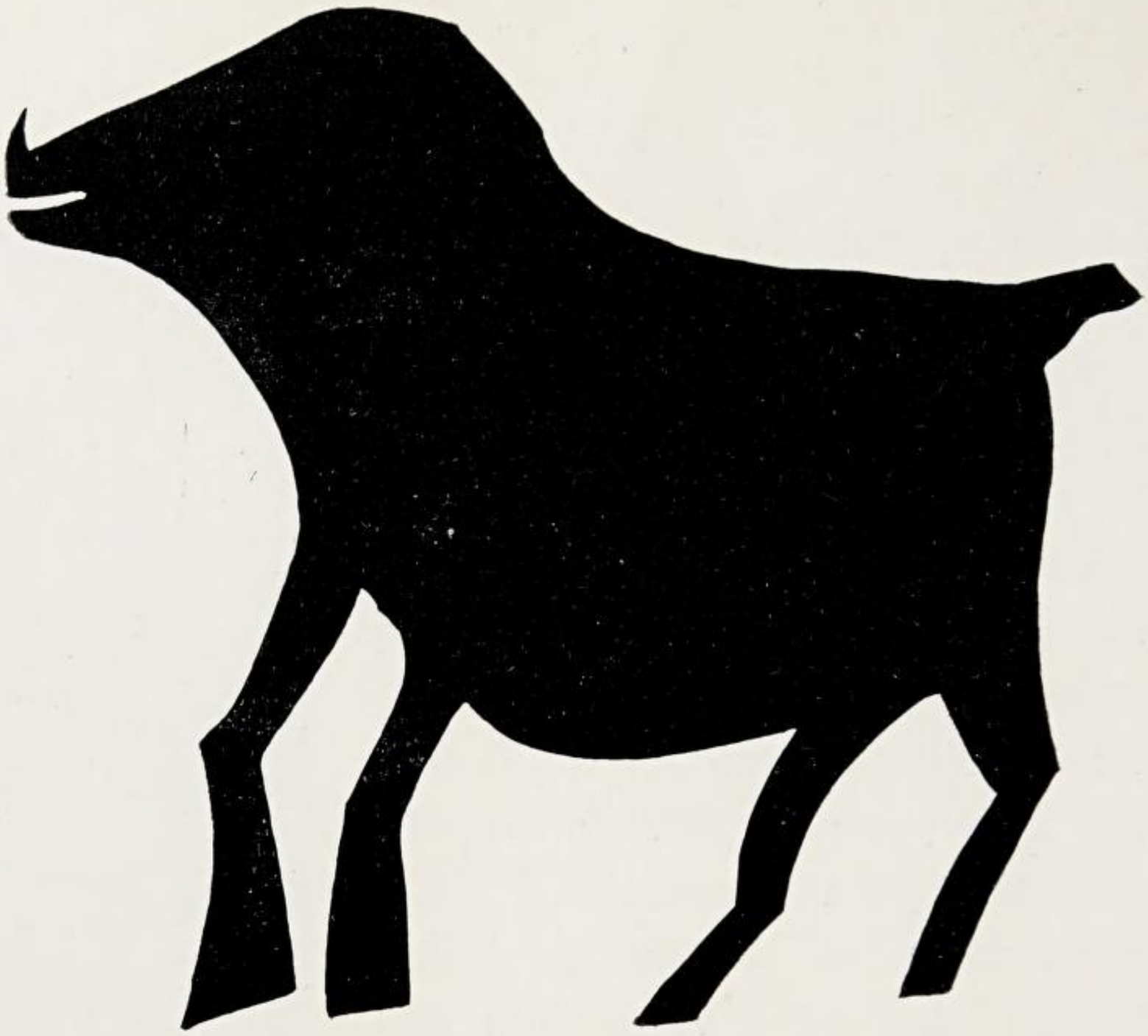


FIG. 184. *Santal wood-carving at Sabaiyya, Santal Parganas, Bihar. Height, 2½ inches.*

FIG. 185. *Kond wood-carving at Jantri, Koraput District, Orissa. Length, 5½ inches.*

FIG. 186. *Muria carving on the door of a house at Bandopal, Bastar. Slightly enlarged.*

FIG. 187. *Kond wood-carving from Jantri, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 188. *Hunting-scene from the Singanpur Cave, Raigarh, C.P.* (*From a drawing by C. W. Anderson.*)

FIG. 189. *Kond wood-carving from Totaguda, Koraput District, Orissa. Actual size.*

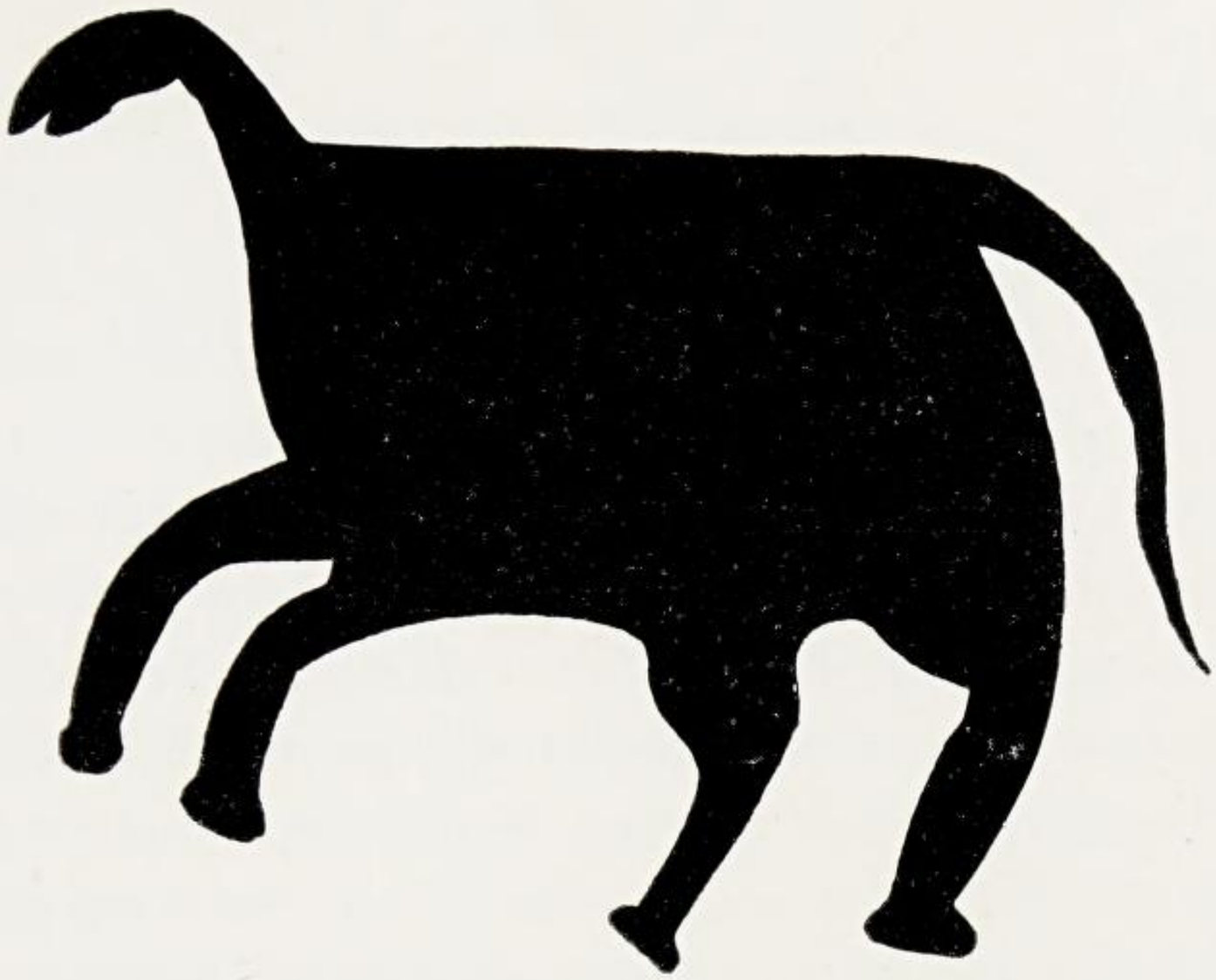


FIG. 190. *Saora wood-carving from Buraduguda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

FIG. 191. *Saora wood-carving from Mandidi, Ganjam District, Orissa. Actual size.*

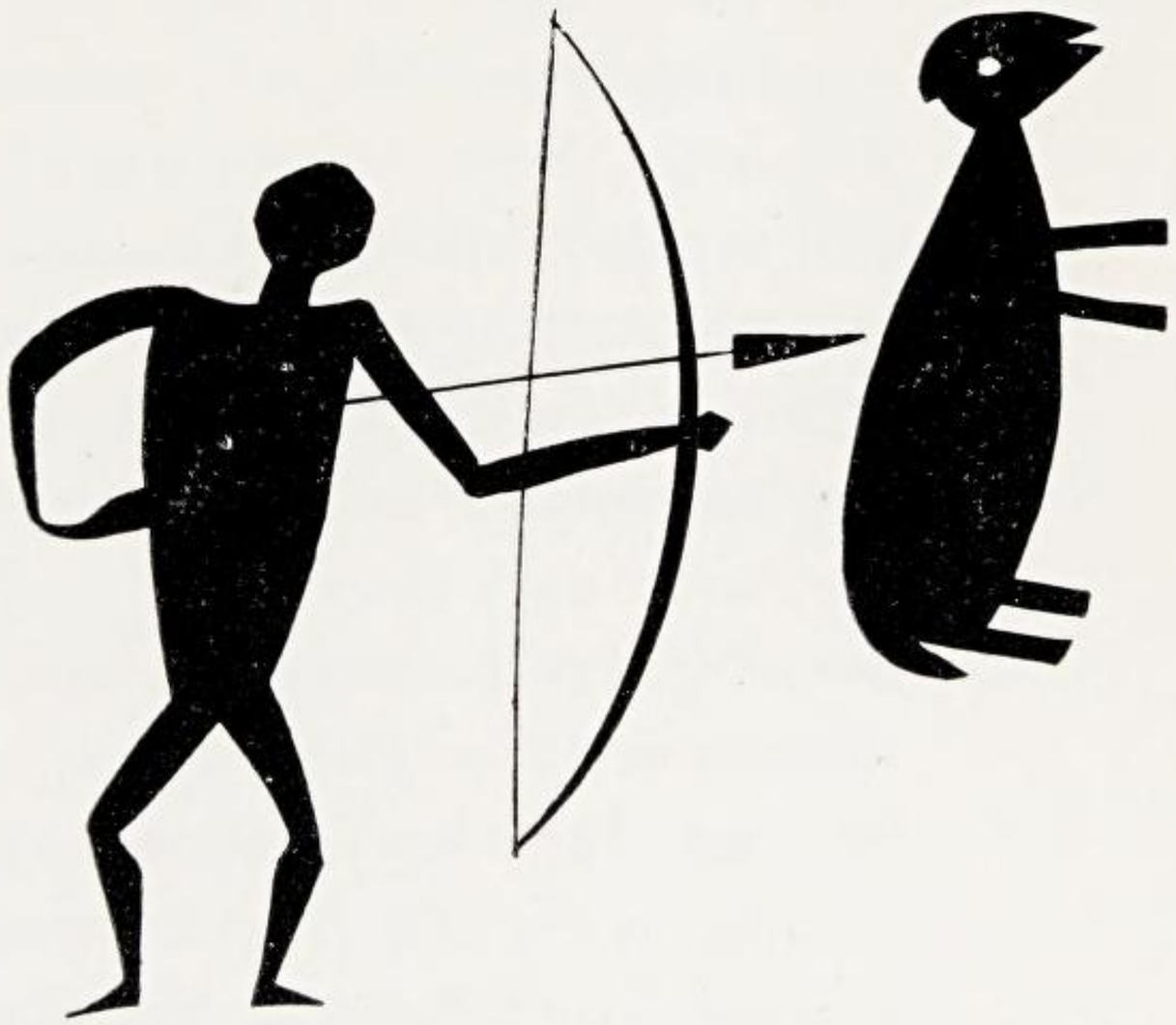


FIG. 192. *Juang carving on the inner door of the boys' dormitory at Balipal, Keonjhar, Orissa. Actual size.*

XX

The Cult of Bhimul

BHIMSEN, THE MIGHTY HERO of the *Mahabharata*, has long held the imagination of the Indian aboriginal, whose own life of poverty and scorn is in such contrast to that of the wolf-bellied Vrikodara. He has now thoroughly established himself in the pantheon; the Saoras rank him among their sky-gods; he has slipped into Bondo legend, where he is equated with the moon; by the Murias he is regarded as on a level with Lingo himself and as the inspirer of the roar and thunder of the drums; he is honoured by Gonds and Baigas as having discovered ardent spirits; in his character of rain-god he has shrines and emblems all over Middle India. Under the name of Bhimul Pinnu, the Konds worship him as giver of fertility and rain.

So far as I know, it is only among the Konds that this widely diffused cult has become associated with any sort of artistic effort. In this tribe, however, Bhimul has inspired a certain amount of rather crude decoration in the way of special tattoo marks, carving, wall-painting and the decoration of grain-bins.

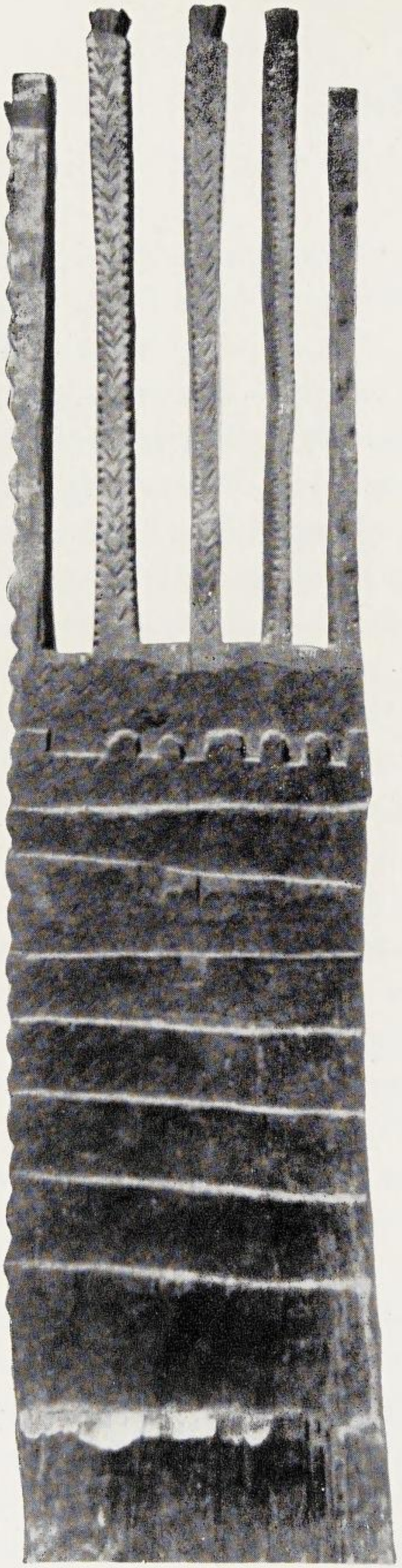
For example, in 1945 I found the Pangia Konds of the Belgarh area painting their grain-bins in an effort to appease Bhimul, for he had appeared to one of their priests in a dream and had threatened that unless they did so he would ruin their crops. In another dream he ordered that certain girls were to be tattooed with similar marks in his honour. The girl illustrated in Fig. 199 herself dreamt of Bhimul, who told her what he wanted done. Her parents hurriedly painted their grain-bin (Fig. 195) and arranged for her to be tattooed. I was told that when this was done she cried, 'Today I am being tattooed. Let me have no trouble. When I make a home, let there soon be

a child.' Bhimul was not only to send the rain; he was also to fertilize the human soil.

At Amblibuwa, a remote Kond village in the east of the Koraput District, I found the mysterious wall-painting for Bhimul Pinnu which is illustrated in Fig. 196. It was on the veranda of the house of the headman, a brokendown old Kond named Kiresa. His experience is worth recording. Some time previously he had had a dream in which Bhimul came to him and said, 'You are the leader of the village; you collect rent for the Maharaja; when officials come, you sit before them; the villagers do what you say. You have found favour with me also and I have come to live in your house.' Kiresa awoke and, as so often happens, promptly forgot his dream, and naturally did nothing about it. A few days later his son had a nasty fall out in the jungle and was permanently lamed. The shamans looked into the matter and discovered that it was Bhimul who had caught the youth by the leg and thrown him down; in fact the offended deity declared that since Kiresa had insulted him he was going to destroy his house with fire. Kiresa begged to be forgiven and Bhimul agreed—through the mouth of the shaman—to overlook his negligence if he sacrificed a goat and made suitable drawings on the wall of his house.

The resultant drawing represents Bhimul Pinnu attended by the Dead. Here, if ever, there seems to be a recollection of a primitive nightmare inspired by the deformed son, the threat of arson, the angry god; the ghostly figures wave their arms, beckoning to the living with appalling gestures.

Fig. 194 is a straightforward fertility painting in honour of Bhimul, in this village called Bhimenja Pinnu; it was on the wall of a Kuttia Kond house at Sirki. Long ago—so the legend runs—Bhimenja and Loharenja were born together at Saphaganna, the traditional home of the Kond race. When Bhimenja saw how poor men were, without axes, vessels or seed, he said to Loharenja, 'You live here on earth and



make tools for them; I'll go to the sky and shower down rain and every kind of seed.' So saying, Bhimenja went up into the sky and sent down every kind of seed to Nirantali, the Earth Mother, who divided it to mankind. A Kond came for his share and she gave him pulses and millets, large and small. But the Kond was very stupid; when he was to receive the seed, he stood behind the pillar of the house (Fig. 193) and, placing his arms round it, held out his hands together. Nirantali filled them with grain, but when he wanted to move he had, of course, to separate them and a lot of the grain fell to the ground. Nirantali told him that his stupidity would always keep him poor, but that if he worshipped Bhimenja he would get seed and rain every year.

Every three years, therefore, in this village—I do not know how far the cult extends—the Konds sacrifice to Bhimenja and make wall-paintings after the patterns shown them in their dreams. Here Bhimenja is displayed riding on an elephant and sowing his seed; at his side he has three baskets

FIG. 193. *Kuttia Kond wooden pillar erected in a house at Sirki, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

containing every kind of grain, and in his hand he holds an iron implement called a *sechu*, used by the Konds to scratch soil over seed which has been scattered in the ashes of a burnt-over forest clearing.

Other wall-paintings show Bhimul and his wife (Fig. 197), his house, and flowers planted in his honour (Fig. 198). Such geometric designs intended to appease Bhimul, allied deities or the Dead, are often to be found on the veranda walls of the Kuttia Konds; a large village, in which all the houses are joined together, may have a communal veranda stretching fifty yards down one side of the street. The walls are some five feet high, but the roof comes down to within two feet of the ground, and the paintings can only be seen with the greatest difficulty. But if they can be seen they are worth looking at; the great vista of fantastic decoration filling every available inch of space is not ineffective.

The drawings are made with millet-flour mixed with water and applied with a twig-brush; sometimes the end of the twig is well splayed out and used to make the stars which are a favourite means of decoration. The background is of smooth dark earth, only rarely cowdunged, but sometimes washed with a red clay against which the white designs stand out sharply.

These paintings are the most evanescent of all; once made, no one ever looks at them; often the gods change their minds and send dreams demanding that they should be rubbed out and new patterns prepared; the mud on a Kond wall is so thinly plastered that it quickly peels away during the rains; and, worst of all, the entire village is shifted every few years, the houses are broken up, and the labour and art forgotten.

There is indeed little here of art for art's sake. No one would paint unless he had to, and nearly every picture has behind it a history of tragedy and sorrow which it was designed to cure.

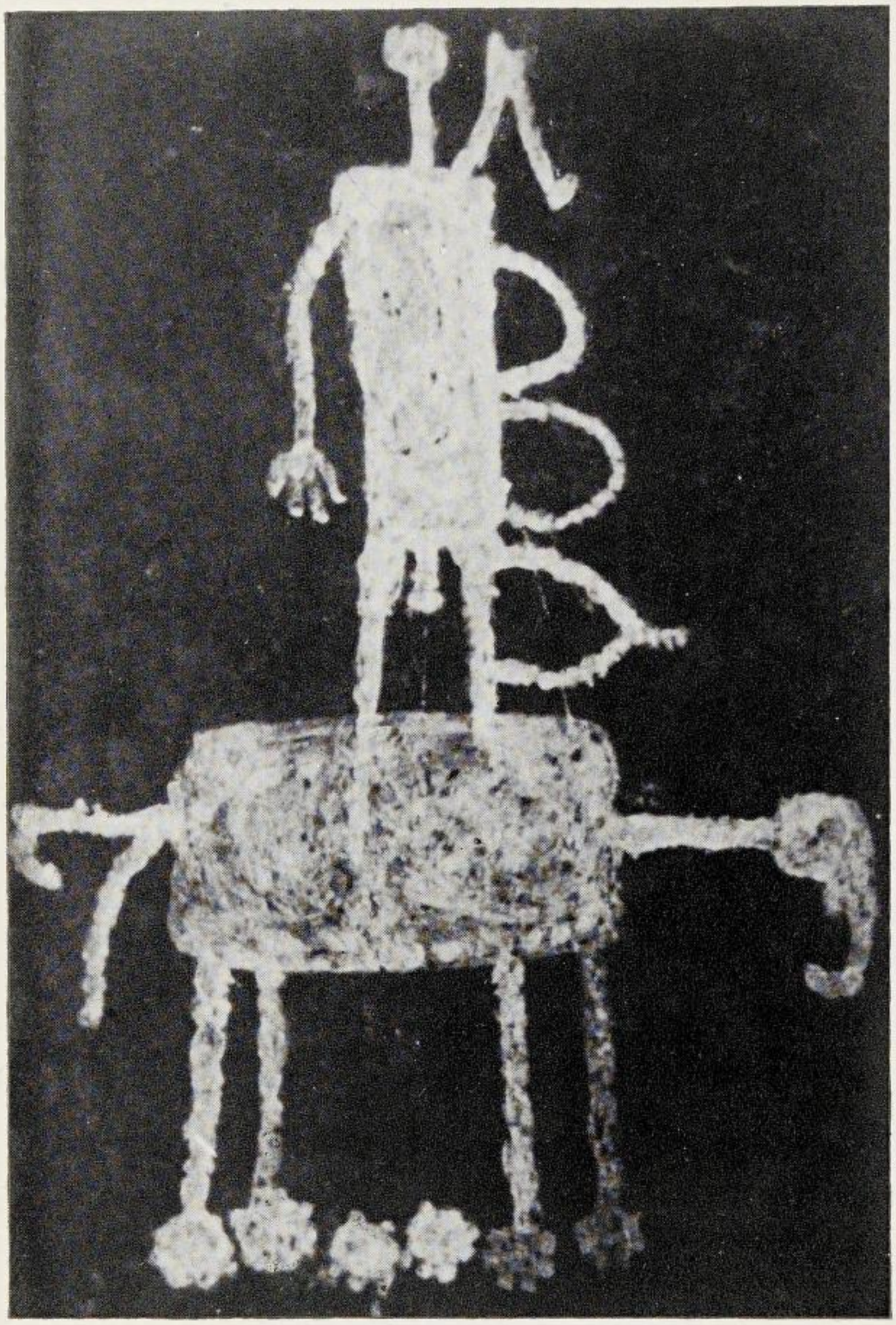


FIG. 194. *Wall-painting for Bhimenja Pinnu at Sirki, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

FIG. 195. *Grain-bin decorated with conventional designs in honour of Bhimul Pinnu. Torgaballi, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, about* 48 *inches.*

FIG. 196. *Wall-painting on the veranda of Kiresa Kond's house at Amblibuwa, Koraput District, Orissa. Width, 48 inches.*

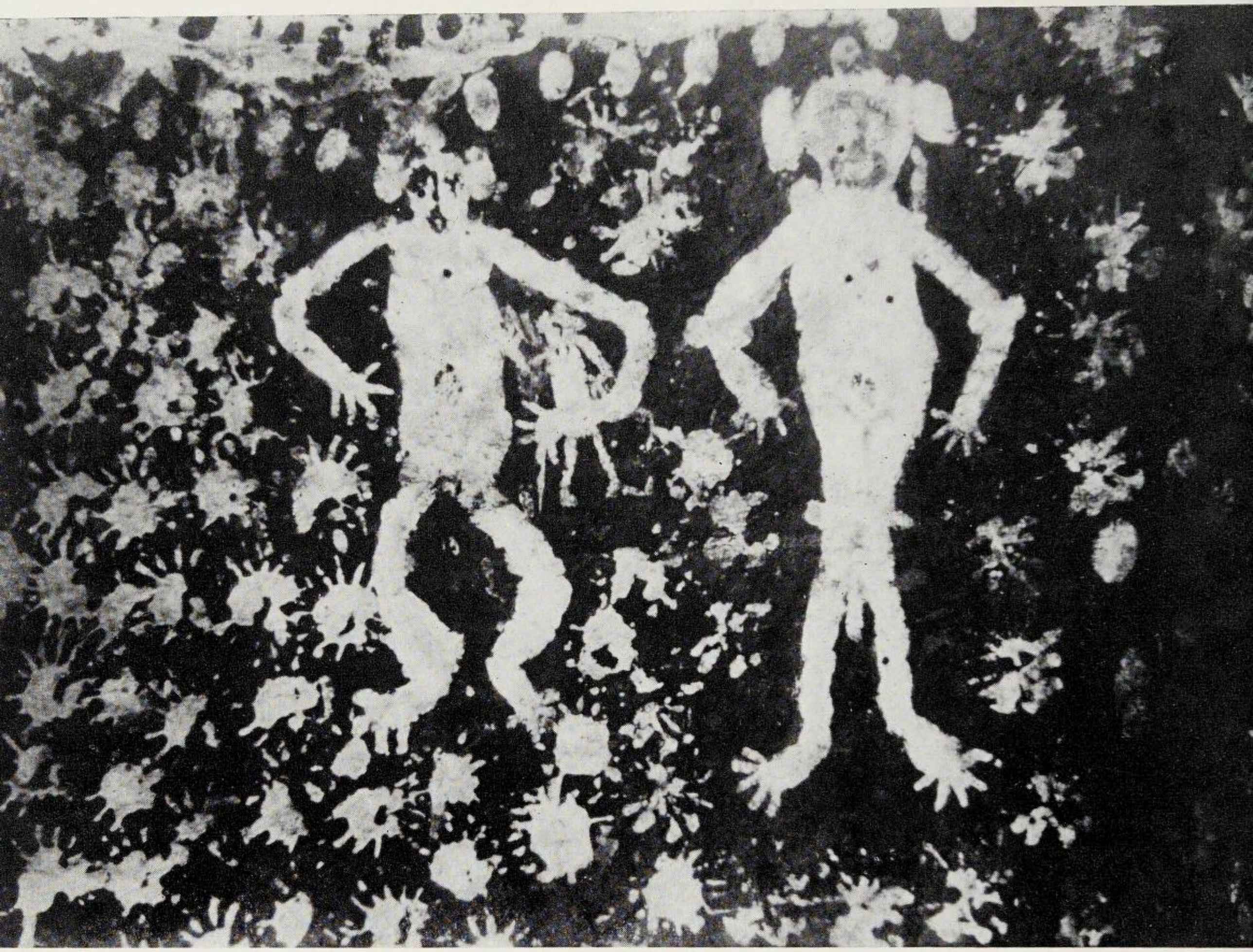


FIG. 197. *Kond paintings, in white on a red background, in honour of Bhimul Pinnu, at Rangaparu, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 36 inches.*

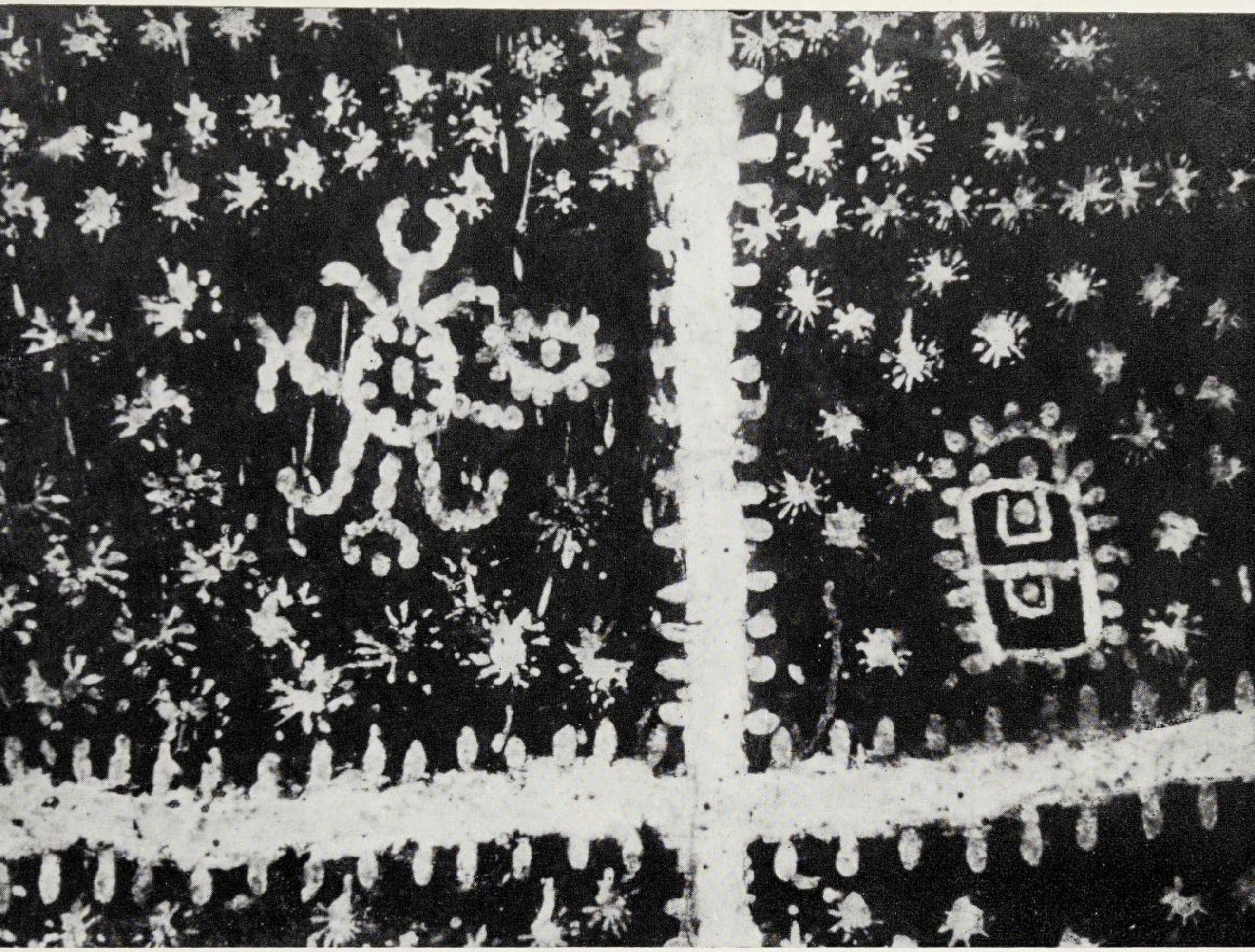


FIG. 198. *Kond paintings for Bhimul Pinnu at Duppi, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 30 inches.*

FIG. 199. *Pangia Kond girl, Nipani of Torgaballi, with tattoo marks in honour of Bhimul Pinnu.*

XXI

A Relic of Human Sacrifice

WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN how the Konds, reluctantly abdicating from their faith in human sacrifice, for a long time preserved human skulls and later made masks to offer in their place. An important item in the paraphernalia of the Meriah sacrifice was the pillar to which the victim was bound, and replicas of these pillars are still made and erected in their little hovels by the Kuttia Konds of north-western Ganjam. These pillars, which stand five to six feet high, are generally forked, for it is said that such a pattern was convenient for the binding of the sacrifice—the victim's head was sometimes pulled right back through the fork.

The pillar, which is dedicated to Illu Pinnu, the house-god, stands in the middle of the building, in front of and partly supporting the platform of grain-bins erected above the kitchen. In front of the pillar is the mortar and grindstone; at its foot a little earthen altar; from it may be hung the bones of sacrificial animals, the rope to tether the Meriah buffalo which in these days is used as a substitute for a human being, and eggshells for use in sacrifice. In one village I found a wooden bell attached to the pillar; during a house-sacrifice the priest used to pull a cord to sound the clapper and the god would then come upon him.

Some of these pillars are fairly old. Whenever the Konds shift a settlement they take their pillars with them and erect them in their new homes. When a son marries and makes a separate establishment he gets a new pillar made, sets it up with the sacrifice of a fowl to his own Illu Pinnu and maintains it all his life. A pillar is not destroyed at the owner's death; it belongs to the household, not to any individual.

The pillars can be made of any wood and of any pattern 'so long

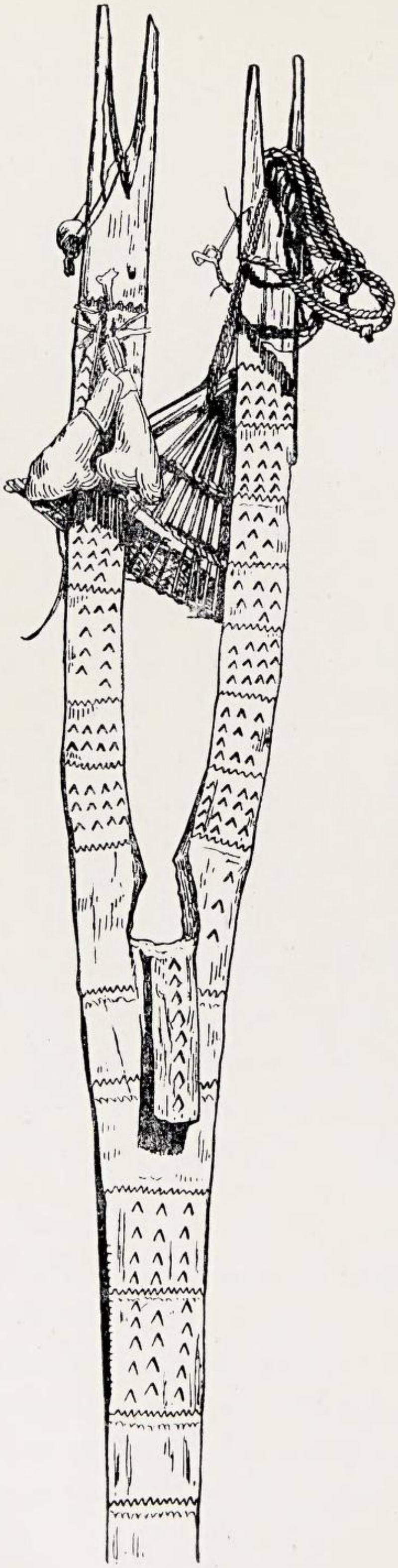


FIG. 200

FIG. 201

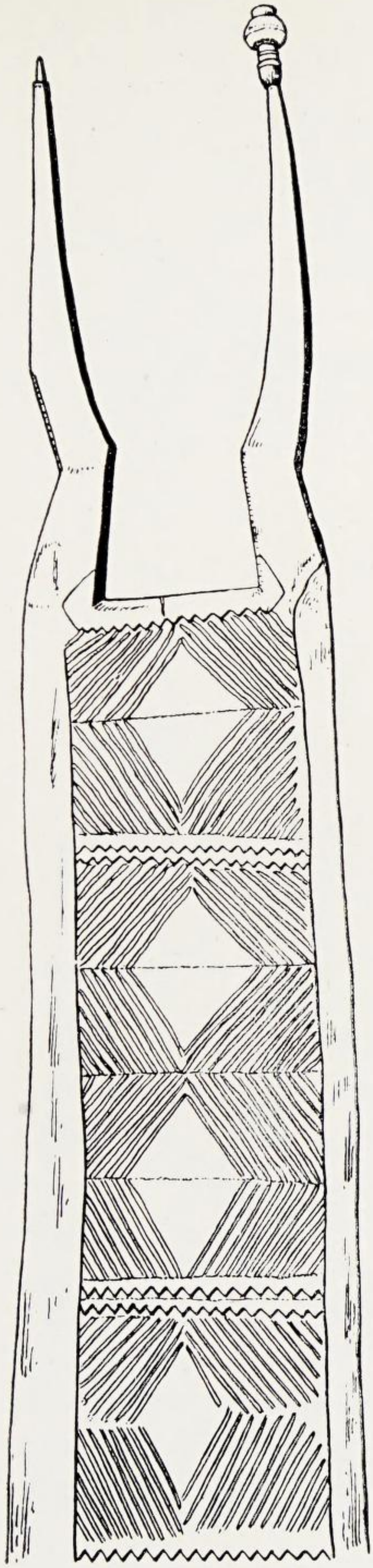


FIG. 202

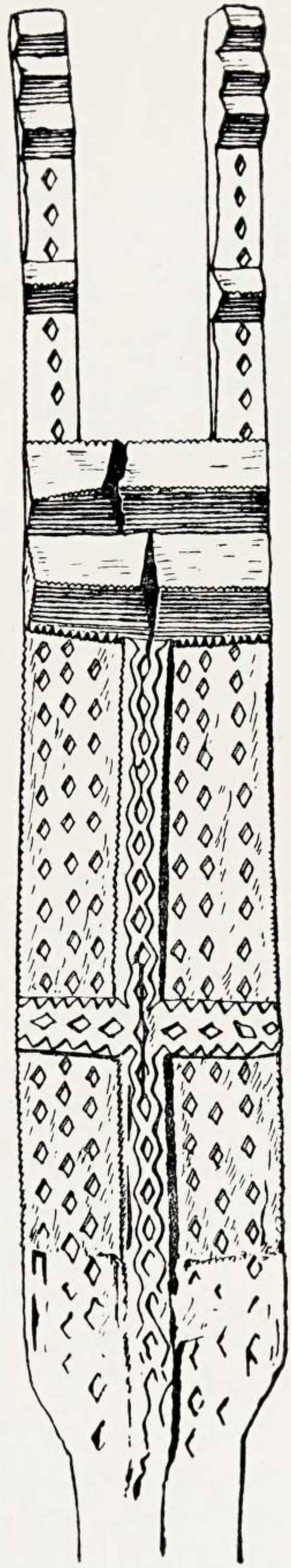


FIG. 203

FIGS. 200-3. *Kuttia Kond pillars, a relic of the days of human sacrifice, from villages in the Ganjam District, Orissa. The pillars average* 5 *to* 6 *feet in height.*

as it pleases the god'. This pattern is often revealed in a dream and, as the illustrations show, can take varying forms. In some villages, the pillars are not erected indoors but in a group at the corner of the street. Not every Kond can make these pillars; their construction is the work of individuals gifted in the art of carving. But the people take pride in them and they are often the only material objects of some dignity and beauty that they have.

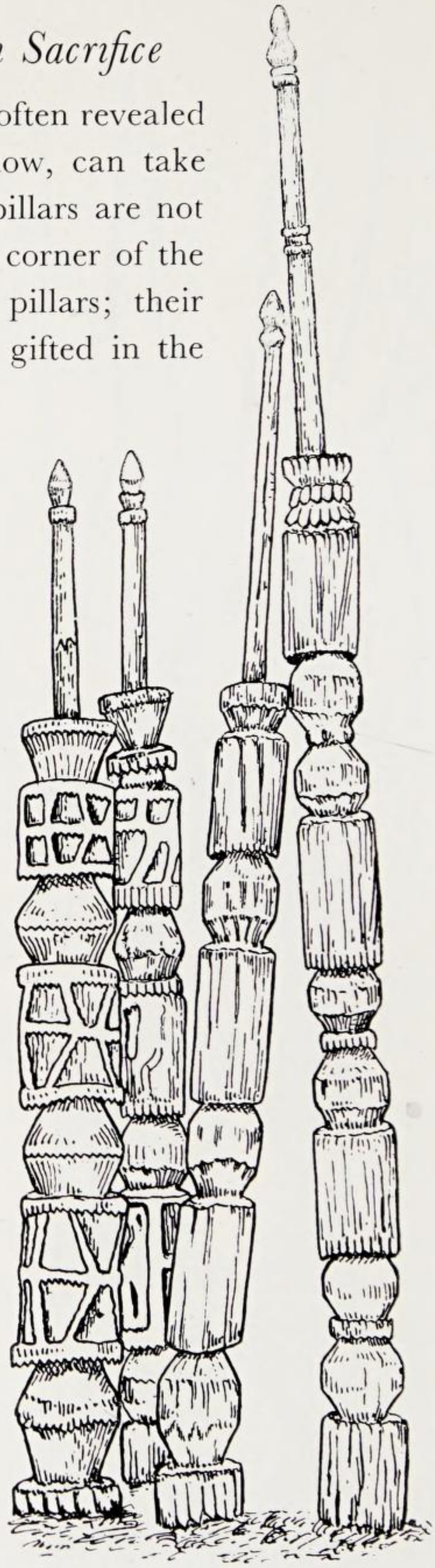


FIG. 204. *Group of pillars associated with the Meriah sacrifice and in honour of the Earth Mother at Dandru, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height of tallest pillar, about* 10 *feet.*

FIG. 205. *Painting of Rawan, here held to be a disease-demon, on the wall of a Hinduized Saora house at Sinkulipada, Ganjam District, Orissa.*

XXII

The Saora Pictographs

THE CUSTOM OF MAKING DESIGNS on walls or floors for some festal or other religious purpose is widespread in India. In Bengal drawings known as Alpona are made to illustrate themes from the Brata stories and to honour Lakshmi, giver of prosperity. Throughout Bihar, Hindu women make elegant paintings at Diwali in praise of the same goddess. At Nag-panchmi, the snake-festival, many Hindus compose pictures of a cobra with multiple hoods erect. In southern India the Gollas propitiate the ancestral dead with floor-paintings called *muggu* (Fig. 207). At a Patnulkaran marriage the figure of a car is drawn on a wall and the name of the bridegroom's clan is written on it. In style the car (Fig. 206) somewhat resembles the Saora shrines (Fig. 213).

The Gond-Pardhan wall-paintings for Krishna's birth-festival deserve somewhat fuller notice. For the past hundred years the Gonds of Mandla have been slowly assimilating Hindu ideas. On the eighth day of the dark half of the Hindu month of Bhadon, which usually falls in August at the height of the rains, they celebrate the

FIG. 206. *Wall-drawing of a car made at a Patnulkaran wedding. Photograph from Thurston's* Ethnographic Notes in Southern India (*Madras*, 1907).

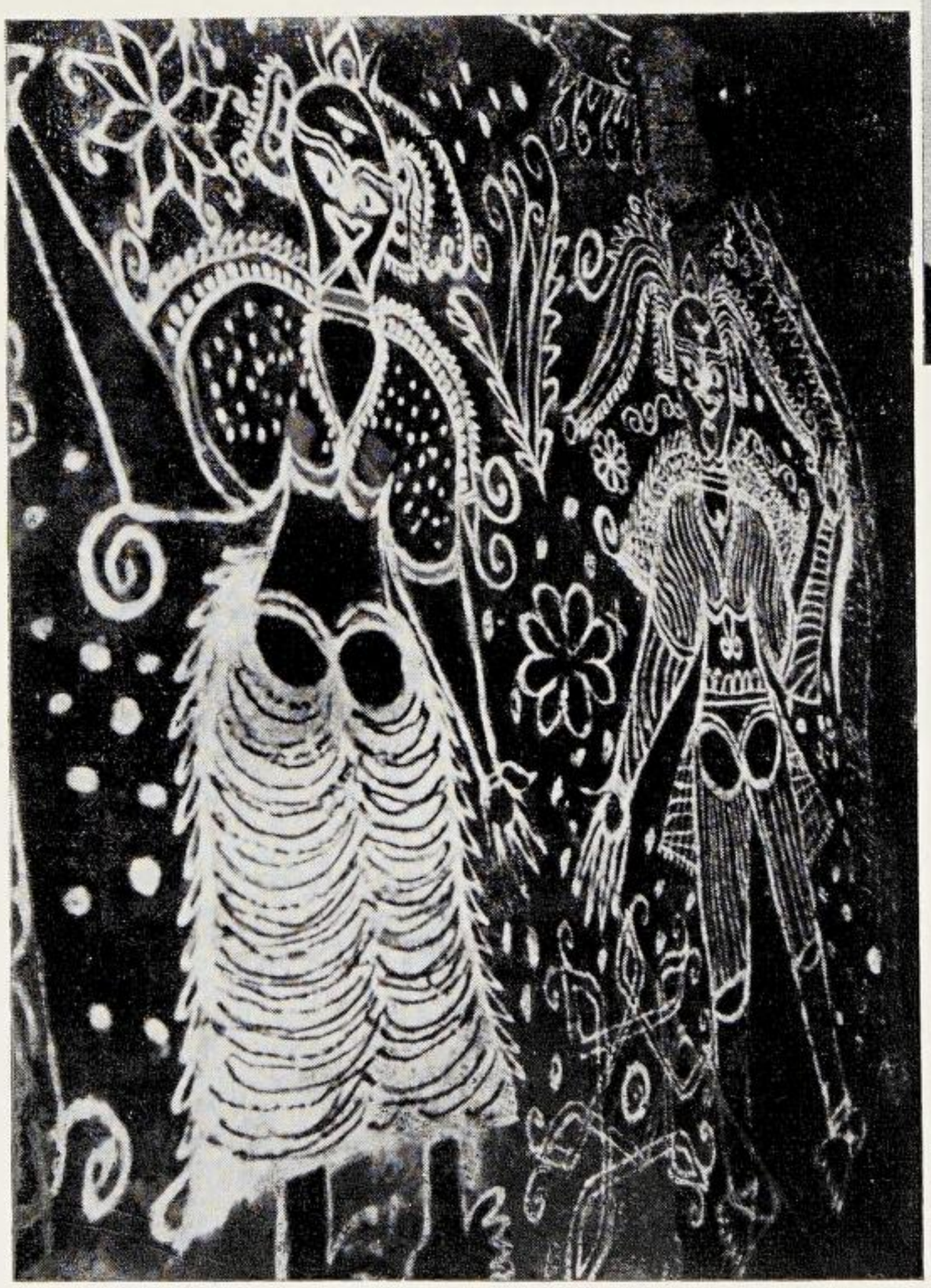


FIG. 207. *Gamalla Muggu painting, in a Golla house, for the propitiation of the Dead. Photograph from Thurston's* Castes and Tribes of Southern India (*Madras*, 1909).

feast which they call Atekanhaiyya, the birthday of Krishna. Boys and girls (it is mainly, for a reason that will appear, the unmarried who observe the occasion) make paintings on the walls of their houses and, after offering simple gifts before them, sit down together for a feast.

These paintings have for subject one which has been made memorable in a hundred superb works of the Rajput and Pahari schools, the adoration of Krishna by the milkmaids of Brindaban. Within a line-frame we see Krishna playing his flute and the milkmaids bringing him pots of milk, curd and wheat-cakes. We see, too, his herd of cows, his tree, the snakes which attacked him on the bank of the Jamuna when he was a baby, and any other incident from the ancient story with which the tribal artist may happen to be acquainted.

The aim of the pictures (one of which is reproduced in Fig. 208), while entirely characteristic of the twist given by the tribesmen to many classic themes and customs, is not one which would be approved by the orthodox Hindu. Their purpose is frankly aphrodisiac. Youths offer milk and curds to the pictures and pray, 'As the seven hundred milkmaids followed Krishna, so let the girls of this village follow me.' Girls, making similar offerings, pray in their turn, 'As Krishna loved the milkmaids and never left them, so let the youths of this village love me and never leave me.' The Pardhans tell a story, which does not appear in the Sanskrit records, that when Arjuna saw his friend Krishna's stupendous success with young women, while his own hopeless passion for Subhadra remained unrewarded, he grew depressed and jealous. He retired to the forest and on the walls of his hut painted the first originals of the pictures made in a thousand homes today, exclaiming, 'O Krishna, you are loved by seven hundred, but not a single one loves me.' Krishna's heart was touched by the prayer and the pictures and he granted his friend's wish and brought him and Subhadra together.

The Saora Pictographs

The Saora pictographs resemble those of the Gonds and Pardhans in being made ceremonially and in certain points of style. Both use the same medium, the wall of a house; both overcrowd this simple

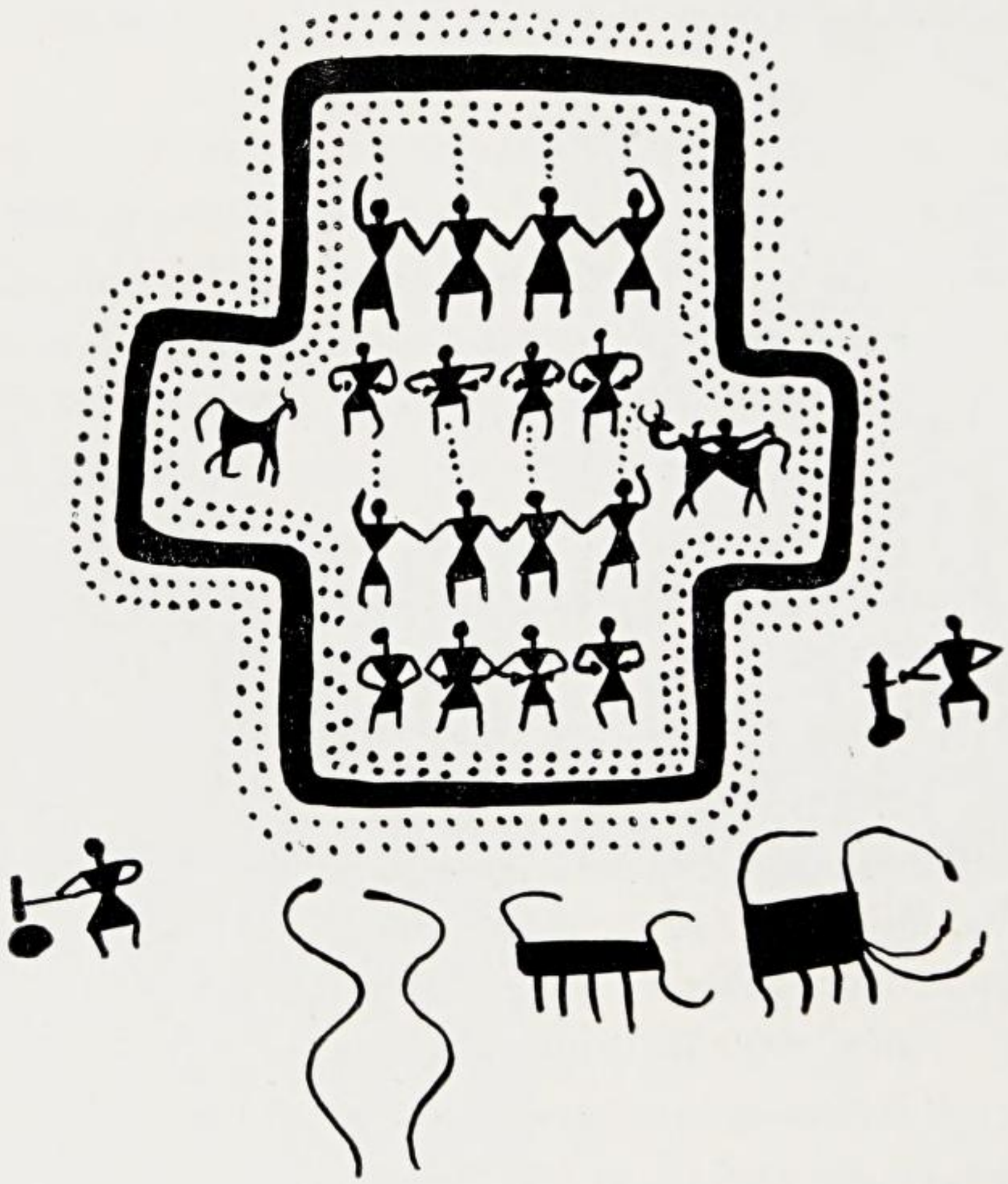


FIG. 208. *Gond wall-painting in red and black on a white ground, representing incidents from the life of Krishna. Patangarh, Mandla District, C.P. Height, 30 inches.*

'canvas'; both insert casual and unrelated details as they occur to them; both affect the frame, drawn either with multiple straight lines or of parallel lines elaborately enhanced. But the Saoras carry the practice far beyond anything imagined by the Gonds or, so far as I know, by any other Indian tribe.

The Saora pictures, which are called *ittal* (probably from the Saora

root *id* which means 'to write') are made in honour of the Dead, to avert disease, to promote fertility and on the occasion of certain festivals.

The *ittals* may be made by anyone 'who knows how'; the artist need not be a priest, but if he becomes adept he achieves a sort of dedicated position and is known as an Ittalmaran or 'picture-man'. Many of the regular shamans—the Kuranmaran—of the tribe also combine this art with their regular professional duties.

The routine procedure, which is almost standardized, is that if the shaman diagnoses the cause of any trouble in a household as due to a demigod or ghost, he suggests the making of an *ittal* as one of the remedies to be adopted. In addition, as the annual festivals come round, the renewal of the old drawings, especially of those designed to improve the fertility of the crops, is accepted as a normal religious obligation.

When a picture is to be made, the householder may either make it himself following the inspiration of his dreams, or he may entrust the task to the Kuranmaran if he is gifted that way, or he may send for the Ittalmaran. The artist comes to the house the evening before he is to start his work. The householder places a small basket of rice and a pot of palm-wine on the ground before the wall on which the picture will be made and the Ittalmaran offers them to the demigod or ghost and says, 'I am an ignorant fellow; I know nothing; but I have been told to make you a house. If I make any mistakes, do not punish me, for it will not be my fault.'

If the householder or the Kuranmaran has not had a dream giving the design of the picture, the Ittalmaran sleeps beside the dedicated rice before the wall with a view to getting a dream himself. Whether his slumbers are actually disturbed or not, he generally has the sense to declare next morning that he now knows exactly what to do. In fact, so vivid is the dream-life of many Saoras that I believe they often do see the pattern of their *ittals* in their dreams.

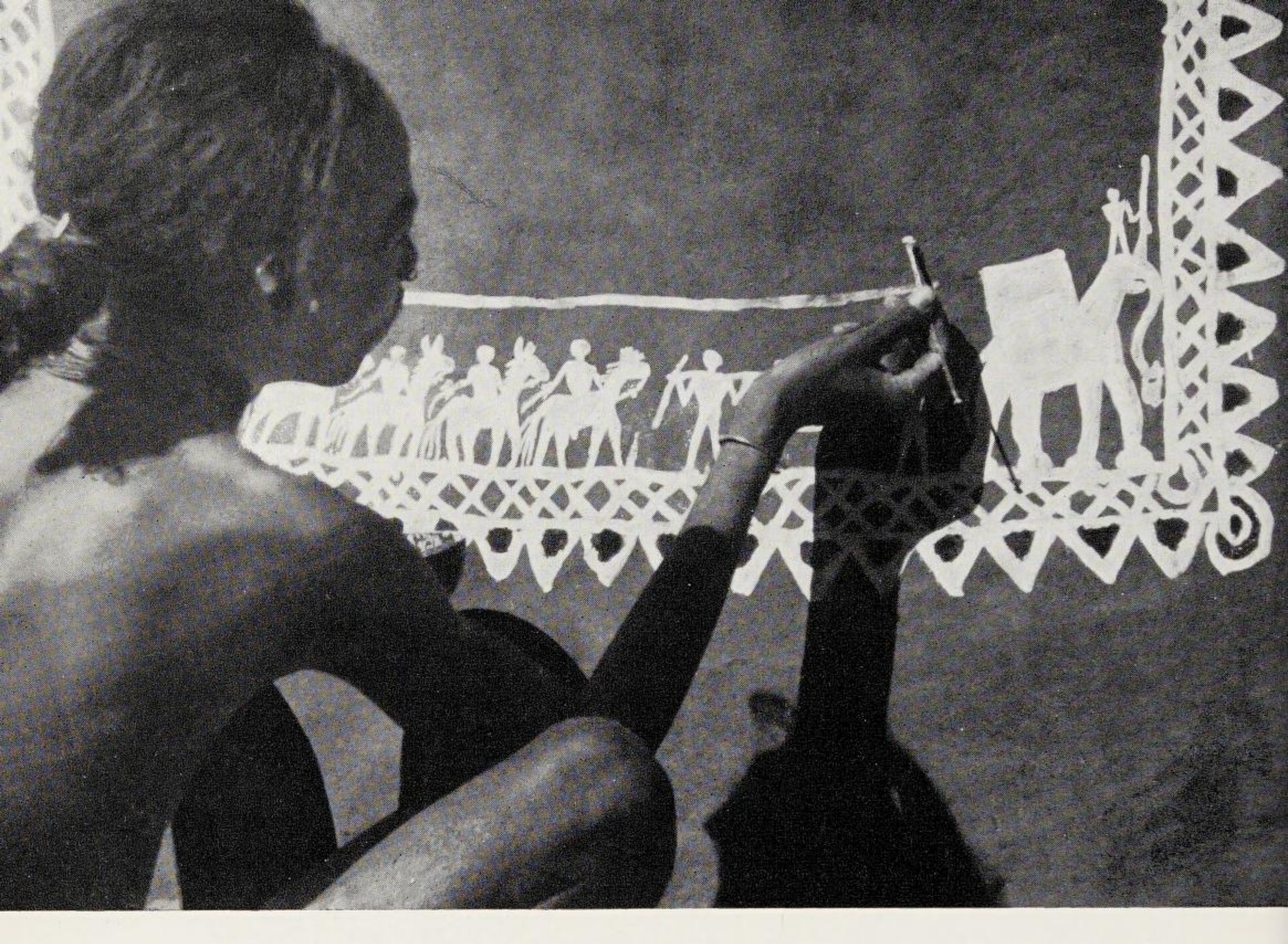


FIG. 209. *A Saora artist (Ittalmaran) at work on a picture on the wall of a house at Potta, Koraput District, Orissa.*

In the morning the artist gets up early and has a wash, but he must not eat—though he may drink palm-wine—until he has finished. He again offers the rice and wine and then settles down to business.

He uses for his work a twig slightly splayed at the end, and his canvas, of course, is the wall of the house freshly washed with red clay. For paint he has rice-flour and water mixed in a small bowl; he may also use ashes and water; sometimes he emphasizes his figures with a little soot or red ochre. Unlike the Gonds, who make their pictures in red or black on a white background, the Saoras nearly always draw in white on a red background.

The Saora Pictographs

The central theme of most Saora *ittals* is a 'house', which is represented by a square, circle or rectangle. The artist begins by sketching in the outline of this, thus determining the approximate size of the picture, and he then proceeds to decorate it or fill it in; he commonly starts from the bottom and works upwards (Fig. 209). In drawing a human figure he first makes an outline of the body, either with a single triangle or with two opposed triangles which meet tip to tip. He whites in the triangle and adds the arms, legs and head. In drawing animals he follows a similar technique. For an elephant, for example, he makes the body first, adds legs, tail, head and trunk in that order, whites in the body and finally draws the rider. A horse is made with two opposed triangles similar to those for a human figure but turned on their s'de. Legs, head, tail and finally rider are then added. Great care is taken to indicate the hair by small strokes along the neck and tail. Similar attention is paid to the skin of a bear, a peacock's tail, a deer's horns or a porcupine's quills.

When the artist has finished the first draft of the picture, the shaman is called in and proceeds to complicate the course of true art by fussy religious inspirations. He worships before the picture and calls on the ghost or god in whose honour it was made to come and inspect it. He falls into a trance; the spirit comes upon him and utters its criticisms through his lips. He takes a lamp and makes a minute examination of every figure. The unseen spirit is seldom backward in suggesting improvements. 'You have not given me a comb,' he may complain, or 'There are not enough chaprasis sitting at my gates' or 'When I was alive I once rode a bicycle; why have you forgotten it?' This is one way in which some of the pictures get so overcrowded; ghosts do not seem to like blank spaces; every inch of wall-space must be filled with tokens in their honour; their greed abhors a vacuum. I once watched the symmetry of an admirably balanced picture destroyed by this kind of supernatural interference.

But in the end the picture is pronounced satisfactory; the artist collects his perquisites of rice and liquor; if the drawing was made at a festival a little procession takes gifts to his house; and the shaman generally concludes the proceedings by suspending a dedicated pot from the roof in front of the picture.

The *ittal* is now regarded as a little temple within the house. These pictures are, in fact, the one-dimensional homes of the Dead, the heroes and the gods. 'A spirit', I was once told, 'sits in his *ittal* as a fly settles on the wall.' Offerings are made before the picture on every ceremonial occasion, and bunches of fruit or ears of grain are hung round the pot at harvest festivals. In certain cases the *ittal* is repainted every year, often with slight variations, so that in some houses there is a sort of palimpsest effect, old designs showing dimly behind the bright outlines of the latest drawing.

The pictographs illustrated here (which are a selection from a large number which I have recorded in the Hill Saora areas of the Ganjam and Koraput Districts) may be divided into several categories according to their meaning and purpose.

Let us first consider the *ittals* which are drawn with the simple and direct purpose of improving the fertility of the crops. These are made every year on the wall of a priest's house before the ceremonial bringing-out of the seed for sowing. When the drawing has been completed, the priest makes a pile of seed-grain before it and sacrifices a fowl or pig, scattering the blood over the seed. *Ittals* made for this purpose often depict agricultural operations and include fertility symbols. Fig. 210, for example, shows a ploughman and his son driving a bullock, cow and calf out to plough. They are followed by a pregnant woman with a bundle of seed on her head, a potter and his wife laden with pots, and two gods seated on an elephant. Here the plough, the calf, the pregnant woman, the pots ready to be filled with food, and the auspicious elephant are symbols calculated to promote the fertility

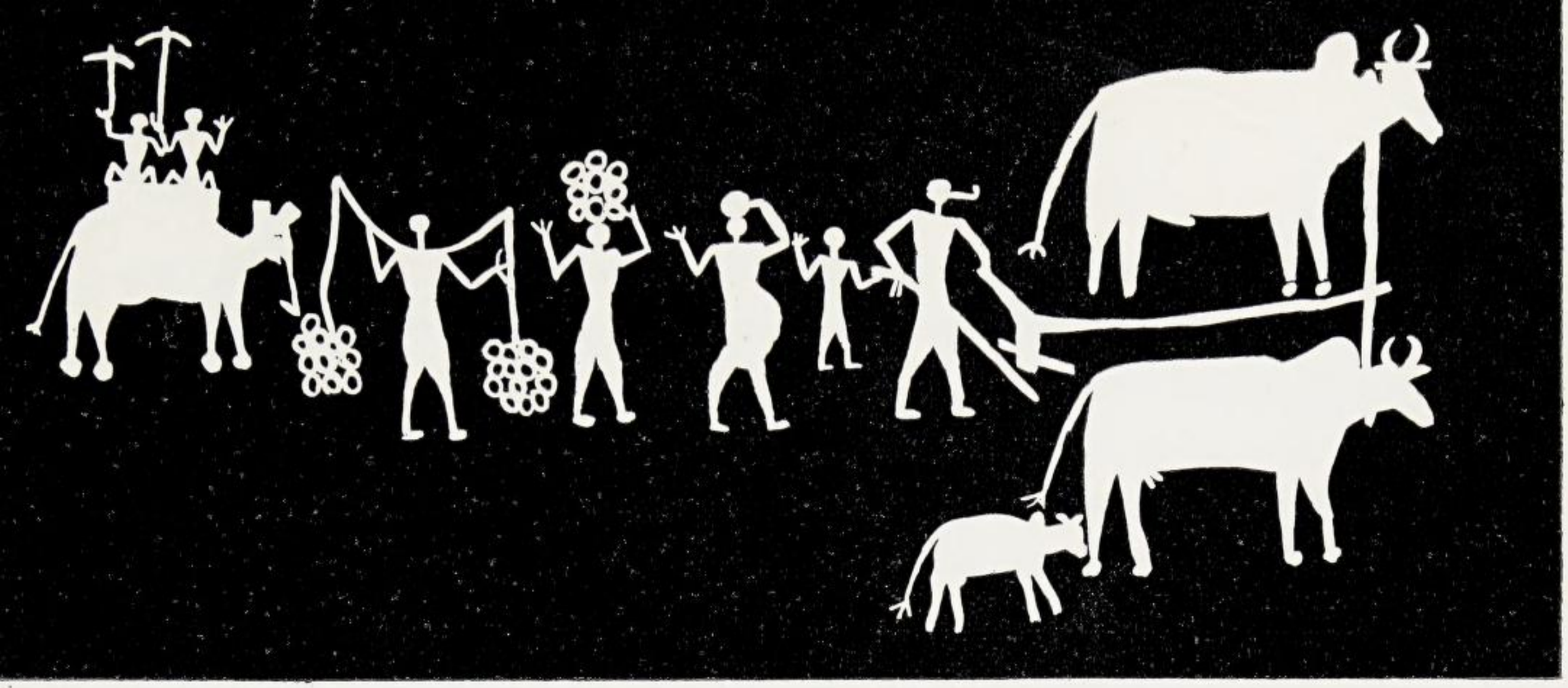


FIG. 210. *Saora fertility pictograph. Karanjaju, Ganjam District, Orissa. Length, 34 inches.*

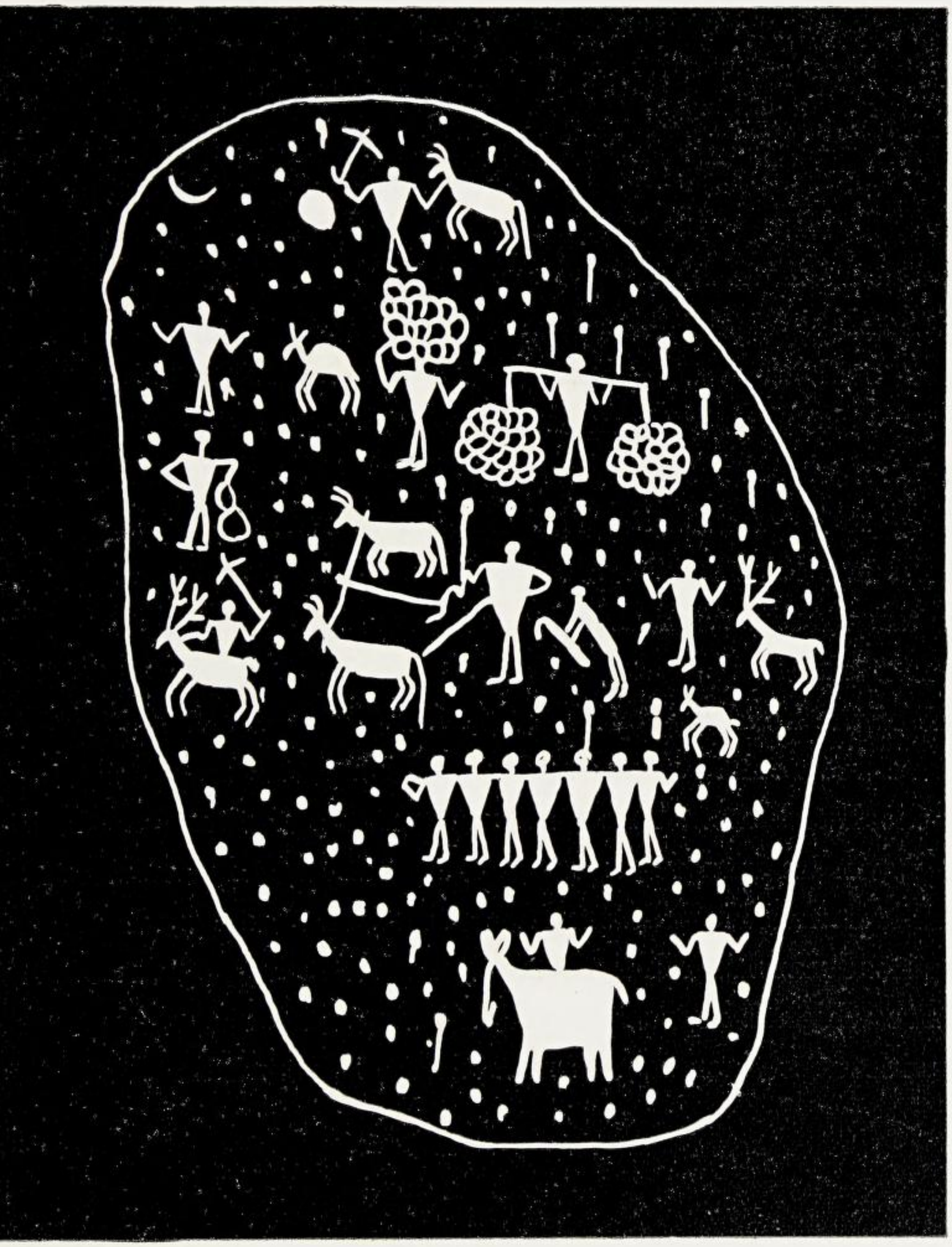


FIG. 211. *Pictograph from Pandiguda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 46 inches.*

and exuberance of the grain. Each kind of seed is offered in turn before the picture with a prayer that the gods will be favourable, and that very day sowing operations are begun.

A similar drawing from Pandiguda (Fig. 211) is in honour of Labosum, the Earth God, and this, too, shows a man ploughing, potters with their pots, an elephant, and a row of women working in the field. The sun and moon stand as witnesses to the bargain that there will be a good harvest.

In Saora theory almost all disease is the result of interference from the unseen world. Sometimes a demigod feels insulted, or neglected, or hungry; sometimes a ghost is lonely and wants to take some loved one from this world to bear him company in that; often a ghost feels famished and forsaken and sends sickness to remind his careless heirs of their duties towards him; occasionally a wandering spirit meets a Saora on the road and follows him home seeking food and shelter—if it does not get it, it sends sickness to the house.

The Saoras have evolved a complex system of appeasement to protect themselves against such supernaturally-inflicted diseases, and an important element in their security measures is the making of *ittals*, which has, however, to be combined with animal sacrifice. I will give a number of examples of such pictures, the aim of which is generally to flatter the vanity as the sacrifice is to appease the hunger of the outraged immortal.

In 1943, the wife of the headman of Kattumeru had what in a city would probably have been called a nervous breakdown; she became so bad as to be practically insane. The shaman diagnosed the trouble as due to the hostility of an important Saora deity called Jaliyasum. 'Make drawings in his name,' he said, 'sacrifice a fowl, and the woman will recover.' The headman himself had a dream which revealed the pattern of the picture which is reproduced as Fig. 219. Its meaning is hardly evident without a Saora's interpretation. It represents, I

was told, Jaliyasum's marriage. In the centre is the palace; people are dancing in it, led by the god himself; on a tree outside monkeys, too, are dancing with joy. Approaching the building are Jaliyasum's mother, sisters and daughters dancing in a row. They are protected by a party of police, carrying their guns on their shoulders. There is a comb, obviously inserted as an afterthought, for Jaliyasum's mother. Sun, moon and stars shine down upon the scene. Sahibosum comes to the marriage on an elephant. The potter of the gods brings pots for rice-beer. A local chieftain comes on a mare followed by its foal; he brings two she-goats for the marriage-feast. Two men bring in a sambhar killed by the god's servants. The Range Officer also attends and sits with his family on chairs. An unwanted guest is caught by Jaliyasum's dog—a tiger—and another dog attacks a lizard while a man shoots at it with bow and arrow.

The obvious intention of all this is to show what an important person Jaliyasum is, how many servants he has, what powerful friends he can command, what an expensive marriage he can afford. And, in fact, since the headman's wife recovered, the neighbours believed that Jaliyasum was sufficiently flattered by this attention.

Some quaint and rather charming essays in flattery are sometimes revealed by the *ittal*. It was believed at Gudang village that the ghost of one Sako Buyya rides about the Under World on a bicycle and it was regarded as essential that when an *ittal* was made for him he should be shown as engaged in this exercise (Fig. 221). The three sons of Lakkia of Angda died and their ghosts went to Assam to make their fortune. This they did so successfully that they were able to buy a car for three thousand rupees. They drove back from Assam to the Saora hills, only to find themselves forgotten in their own home. They made their father ill but when he made a drawing of the car (Fig. 228) they allowed him to recover. There is a curious story behind Fig. 212. Tissano, a Kuranmaran of Tumulu village, went

with his wife to the tea gardens of Assam. It is easier perhaps for ghosts to do well there than for men, for Tissano did not have the good fortune of the three ghostly sons of Lakkia. He got very little money, his wife sickened and died and he himself fell desperately ill. A Kuranmaran told him that his illness was caused by Karnosum and his own spirit-helper, a Mannesum, which had caused the trouble. An *ittal* was made on the wall of the hut in the tea gardens and Tissano recovered sufficiently to return home.

But after a year in Tumulu, Tissano again fell ill and now the local Kuranmaran declared that Karnosum and the Mannesum were very angry that Tissano had left them behind sitting like flies on the *ittal* of his hut in Assam. 'We had to get two aeroplanes,' they said, 'and fly after him and now, when we have got here, there is nowhere for us to stay.' Tissano immediately made an *ittal* in his house which exactly resembled the one he had made in Assam and which is illustrated in Fig. 212. It shows the Mannesum on an elephant, his clerk on a horse and his chaprasis in a row. At the bottom, Karnosum appears with his chaprasis. There are two banyan trees with monkeys eating bits of honeycomb. When the picture was ready and the two spirits came to inspect it, they complained that it did not include the two aeroplanes which they had chartered with such great trouble and expense. They were quickly added and all was well.

Although the majority of Saora *ittal* are full of elaborate and complicated detail, others are characterized by a pleasing simplicity and directness. For example, the symbol for Yuyungboi, the Sun God who afflicts people with leprosy, is drawn with vigour and clarity (Fig. 223), as are some of the *sadru-ittals* which represent the little shrines built in the village streets to accommodate both gods and ancestral ghosts. One such shrine is shown in Fig. 213. This *ittal* was made by a man called Singraju, an inhabitant of the beautiful hill-village Arangulu.

FIG. 212. *Saora drawing from the house of Tissano at Tumulu, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 52 inches.*

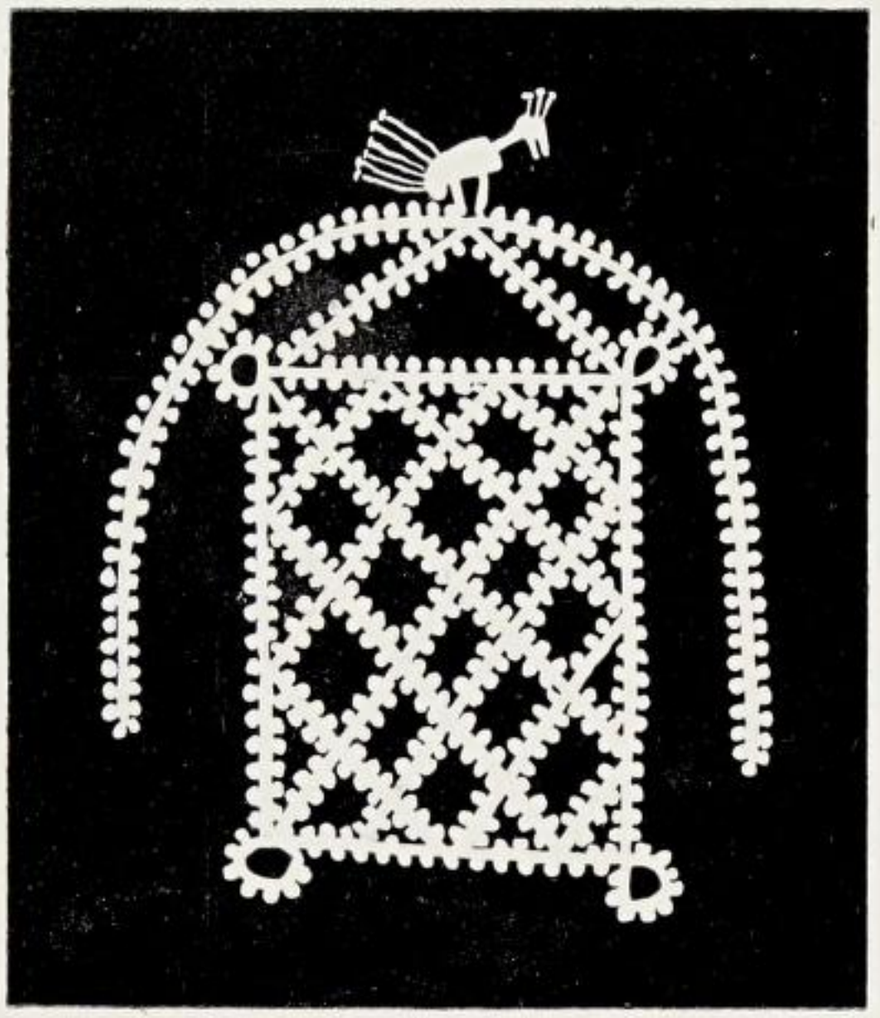


FIG. 213. *Saora picture of a shrine with peacock watchman. From the house of Singraju, Arangulu village, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 24 inches.*

Long ago Singraju's father made a *sadru*-shrine for the god Karnosum. After his death the shrine fell into disrepair and Singraju forgot all about it. But one night towards the end of 1943, his father's ghost visited him in a dream and said, 'I made this shrine for Karnosum and offered sacrifices there while I was alive. Repair it at once and make an *ittal* for him also inside the house.' Singraju repaired the shrine but considered that in asking for an *ittal* as well, his father's ghost was asking for too much. But shortly afterwards Singraju's wife fell ill, and when the shaman was consulted he declared the trouble was due to this attempt at economy. That night Singraju had another dream; Karnosum came to him, insisted on an *ittal* and himself designed it, tracing the outline on the ground with a stick. The following day Singraju had the drawing made, and his wife recovered.

One of Singraju's neighbours, an elderly and rather drunken Saora called Hargu, had a regular picture gallery in his house, which might be taken as illustrating the influence of the hangover on tribal art. For whenever Hargu returned home from a drinking-bout, he woke up the next morning convinced that a singularly nasty demigod was persecuting him and had an *ittal* made to put him right. For example,

Figs. 214, 215 and 216 all represent various hills on which Hargu got into trouble on his way home, his own interpretation being that he was accosted and followed back by the gods living there. A hill-god's house is, of course, a hill, and the three drawings give an interesting idea of the Saora's symbolization of a hill-house. Fig. 214 is associated with the god Borongsum; it shows the hill with the god standing below. After another orgy, which seems to have occurred some time in 1940, Hargu made another drawing, this time for Kurtisum of Deogiri who in a dream promised in return to keep all other gods away. Hargu, who was an Ittalmaran, drew the hill with Kurtisum standing on the summit with his umbrella and his son a little below with a tuft of feathers worn Saora-fashion in his hair (Fig. 215).

FIG. 214. *Saora picture of the hill-abode of the god Borongsum. Drawing in the house of Hargu, Avangulu village, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 20 inches.*

But Kurtisum failed to keep his promise. Two years later Hargu went to a neighbouring village and got very drunk. He staggered home and next day felt extremely ill. The shaman told him that this time it was Benasum, a god living on Jopsir Hill, who had afflicted him. The god was summoned and through the mouth of the shaman declared, 'Hargu was very drunk, rolling along the road, when he met me. I was hungry, but he was rude to me and gave me nothing. So I followed him home. But if he gives me plenty to eat I'll let him alone.' That night Benasum showed Hargu in a dream the kind of picture he wanted (Fig. 216) and told him to sacrifice before it a pig and a white hen. Hargu recovered, but the next year and the next

FIG. 215. *Saora picture of the hill-abode of Kurtisum. Another drawing in Hargu's house. Height, 27 inches.*

he had similar trouble and there were more *ittals* which I have no room to illustrate here.

A rather striking *ittal* in a different style is reproduced as Fig. 226. It comes from Angda village and represents the houses of three different gods, Yanmulsum, Karnosum and Sardasum, who all attacked the unfortunate house-holder, Sartino, simultaneously and made him very ill indeed. The figures in each house represent the god and his relations. Below there is a procession, led by Sardasum's clerk on a horse and his other servants on an elephant. They are followed by more servants suitably mounted and by a party of potters and their wives. These have come to sell pots to the gods, for they, being Hindus, have to use fresh pots for every meal. It is curious that, although few Saoras would claim to be Hindus, they generally regard the gods and their more distinguished ghosts as having adopted this religion.

Many drawings are associated with the Dead, and it is possible to gain from them some notion of the Saora conception of life in the other world. It is not easy to understand all the details of these pictures without an exhaustive discussion of Saora eschatology, but it may be said briefly that the Saoras believe that the Dead go to an Under World (Kinorai) which is ruled by beings which would be more

properly described as 'spirit-helpers' than 'gods', the Ildasum or Sedasum. Both the Dead and these spirit-helpers have many and intimate relations with the living. As we have seen, the Dead pay frequent visits to demand attention and sustenance from the living and, particularly before their funerary rites have been completed, can make themselves very troublesome indeed. The spirit-helpers, too, often visit men, and there is an elaborate system of matrimonial relationships between this world and the next. Every Kuranmaran takes a wife from among these spirit-helpers, has children by her and calls on her for inspiration whenever he has to perform his sacred duties. Similarly the Saora priestesses have their unseen husbands who visit them in dream and trance. How vividly imagined some of these relationships are will be noticed in the stories regarding Figs. 220 and 225.

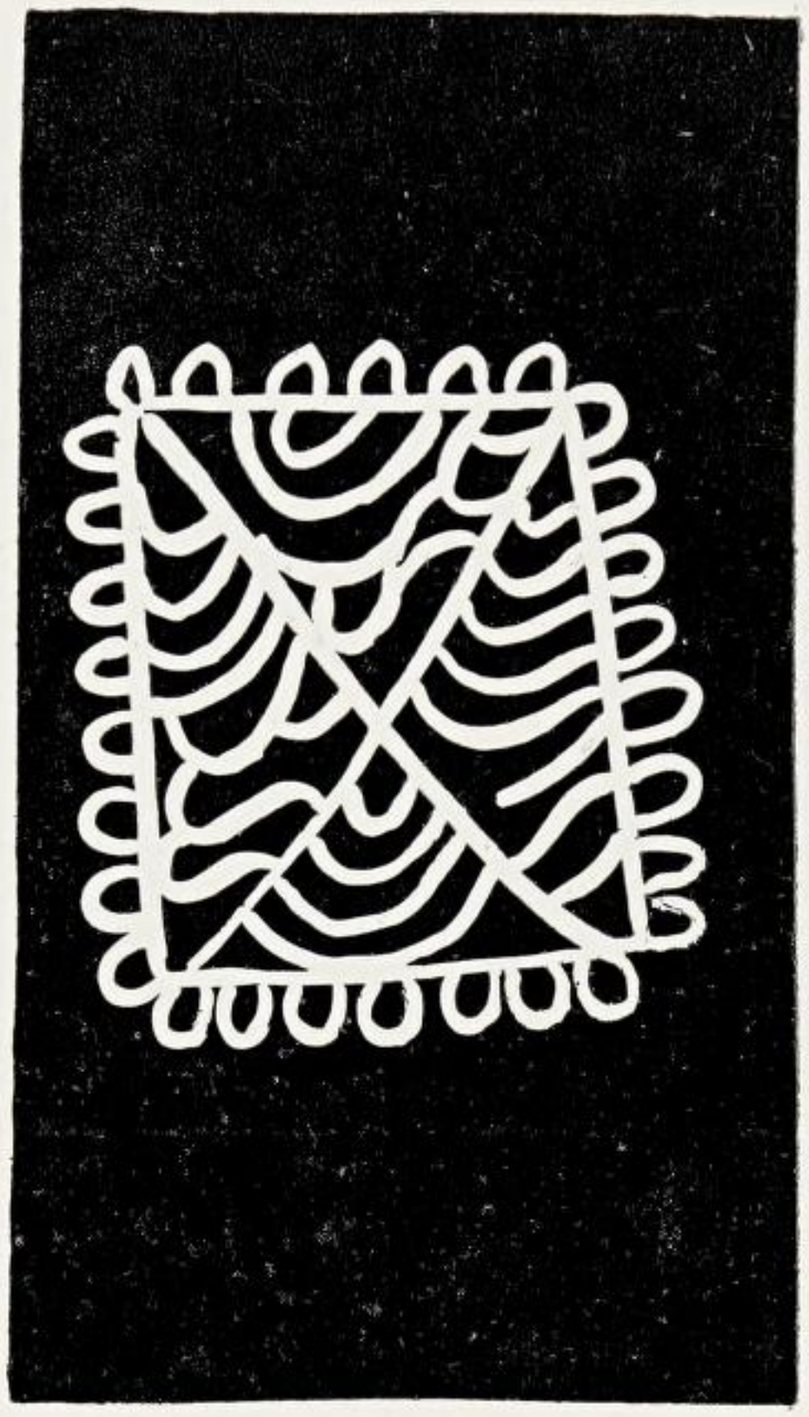


FIG. 216. *Saora picture of the hill-abode of Benasum. Another drawing in Hargu's house. Height, 24 inches.*

Fig. 217 reproduces a picture made in the house of Saitano at Kamalasingi. Saitano's father was old and ailing; one night the ghost of the grandfather appeared in a dream and announced his intention of taking the old man to the Under World to keep him company. Saitano protested but to no purpose, and the following day the father died and Saitano performed the necessary rites. But a year later he himself fell very ill, and now his own father's ghost came upon the shaman and declared that the ordinary ceremonies were insufficient and that he must have an *ittal* in his honour. 'Draw a man

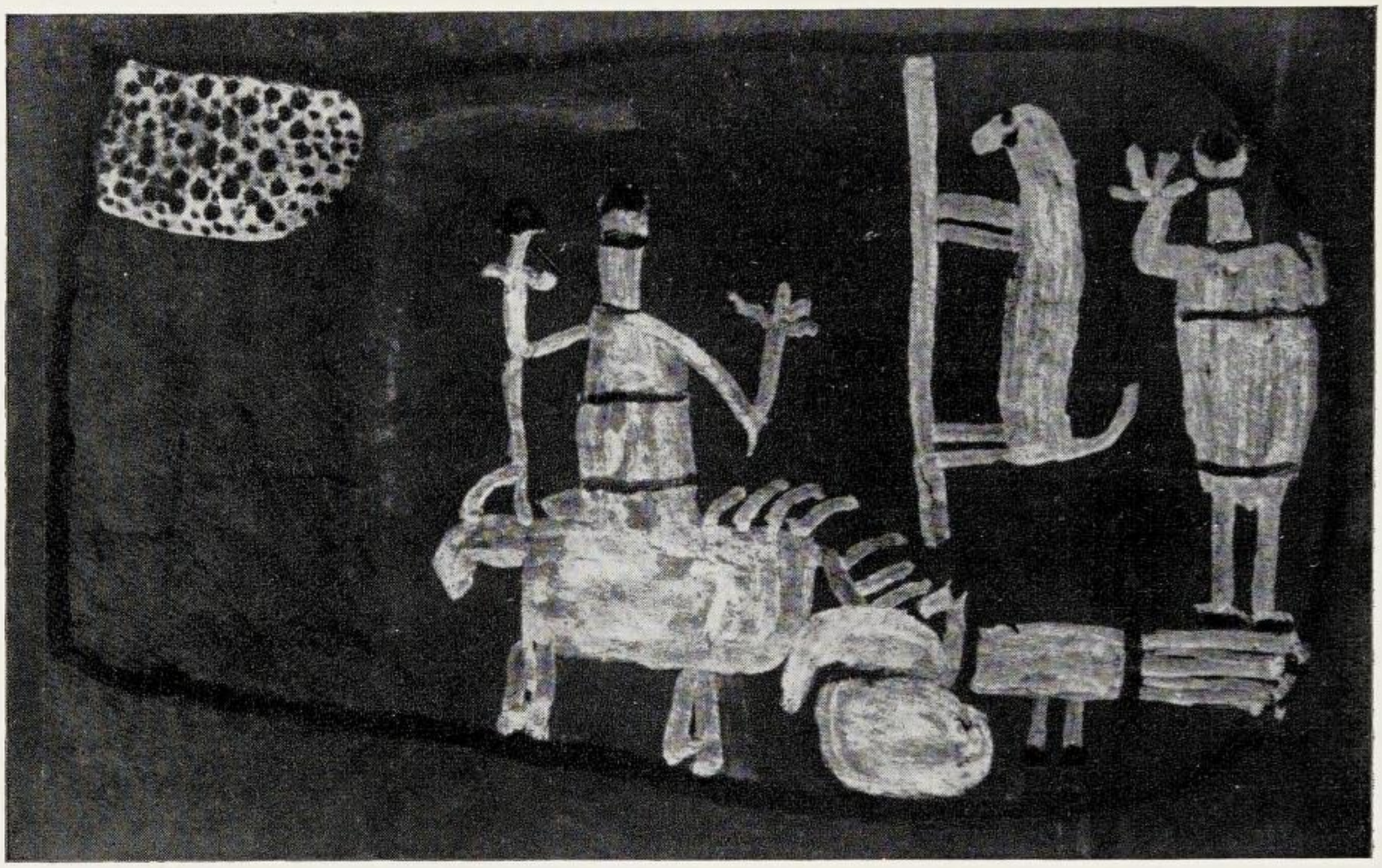


FIG. 217. *Saora picture to appease the Dead, from Kamalasingi, Koraput District, Orissa. Length, 32 inches.*

on a horse,' he said, 'and make a cowbell for my cattle in Kinorai. Give me a bit of honeycomb to eat, with a bee sitting on a branch, and a woman bringing me a bowl of gruel. Do it like this,' he said, tracing the pattern on the ground, 'and you will recover.' Next morning Saitano himself made the picture and the ghost visited him again and professed himself very pleased. The crudity of this drawing is perhaps due to the fact that when Saitano made it he was a very sick man.

The Dead, as everywhere in India, have an intimate connexion with the fertility of the crops. There is an interesting story behind Fig. 218. At Mannemgolu, at the time of taking out the seed in 1944, the ghost of a man named Jamburu who had died five years before began to pester his widow for attention. He gave her fever; he made noises at night among the pots; he visited her in dreams. One night he showed her a house—'That's the kind of house I live in; make me

one like that on your wall.' Then he showed her men riding on elephants and horses—'That's how the other Dead come to visit me.' He showed his potter and his lizard (which is kept as a pet in the homes of the Dead) and concluded, 'Draw all these things before you take out your seed; otherwise your crop will be ruined.' Early next morning the widow hurried to the shaman and found that they had each had exactly the same dream. The Ittalmaran drew the picture under their direction; its central feature is a substantial two-storeyed house, with three rooms crowded with the dead Jamburu's wives and other dependants.

In this drawing we are gradually approaching the elaborate and detailed representations of the other world which are characteristic of the Potta area of Koraput. Fig. 220 comes from the house of Dalimo, the shaman of Karubai village. This is its story. When Dalimo first became a shaman, there was a certain spirit-helper in the Under World who earned his living as a potter. It was this spirit-helper's wife whom Dalimo 'married' when he began his work as a shaman. But some time later another woman in the Under World, who had the duty of clearing away the cowdung from the sheds belonging to the wealthier ghosts, began to make a nuisance of herself and frequently visited Dalimo in dreams, begging him to marry her instead. At last he promised to do so; he killed a goat for her and dedicated a pot in her honour, hanging it up beside the pot already dedicated to his first wife.

The unfortunate Dalimo now began to suffer—in his strange other-world of trance and dream—all those embarrassments which are so familiar to those who are a little weak in dealing with women. If he went to diagnose the cause of a neighbour's fever, his first spirit-wife, who should have been at his side to guide him, refused to come. If she did come, she would make herself so unpleasant that Dalimo would run out of the house like a madman. His practice naturally began

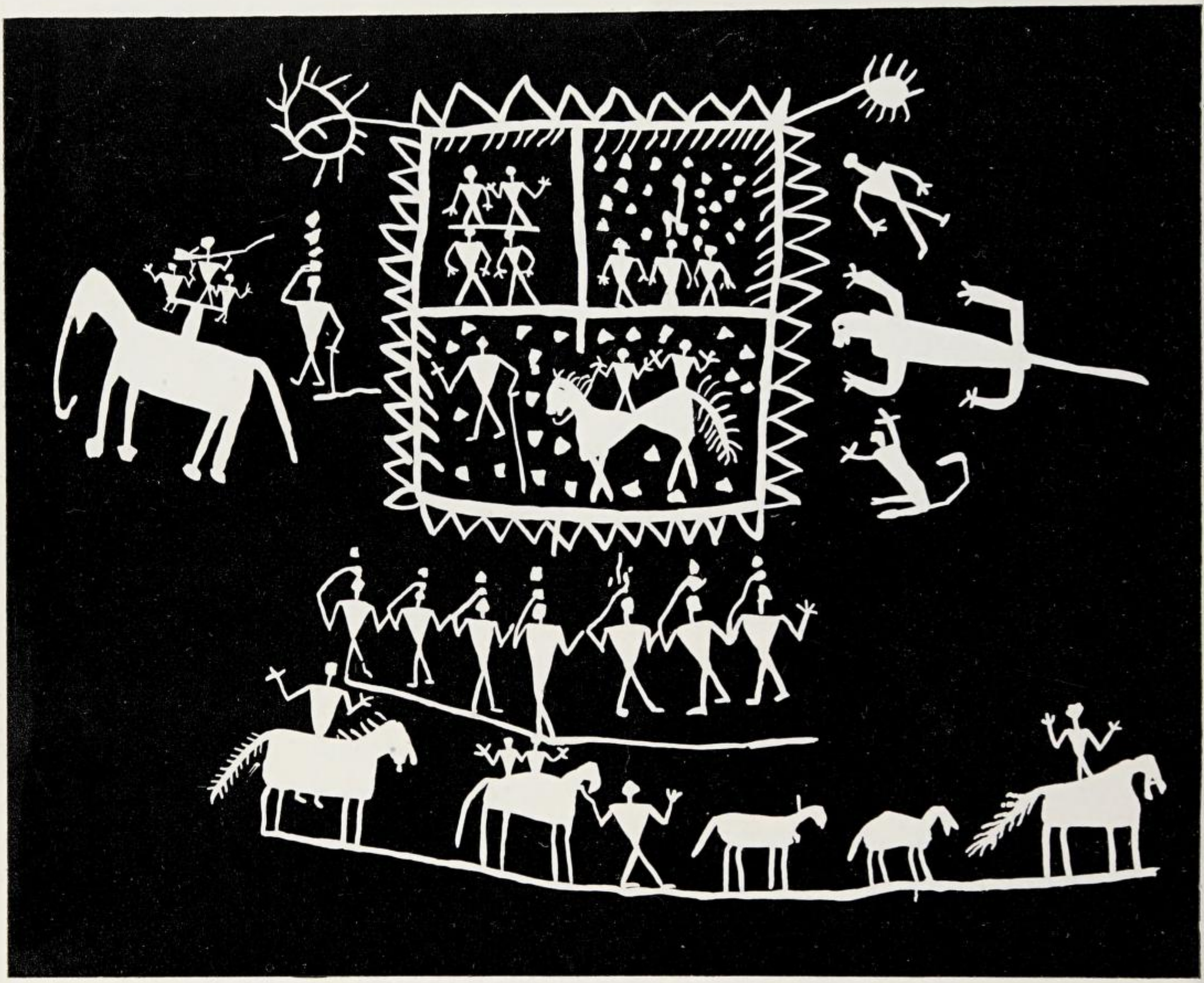


FIG. 218. *Saora picture to divert the ghost of a man which pestered the unhappy widow. Mannemgolu, Koraput District, Orissa. Height, 50 inches.*

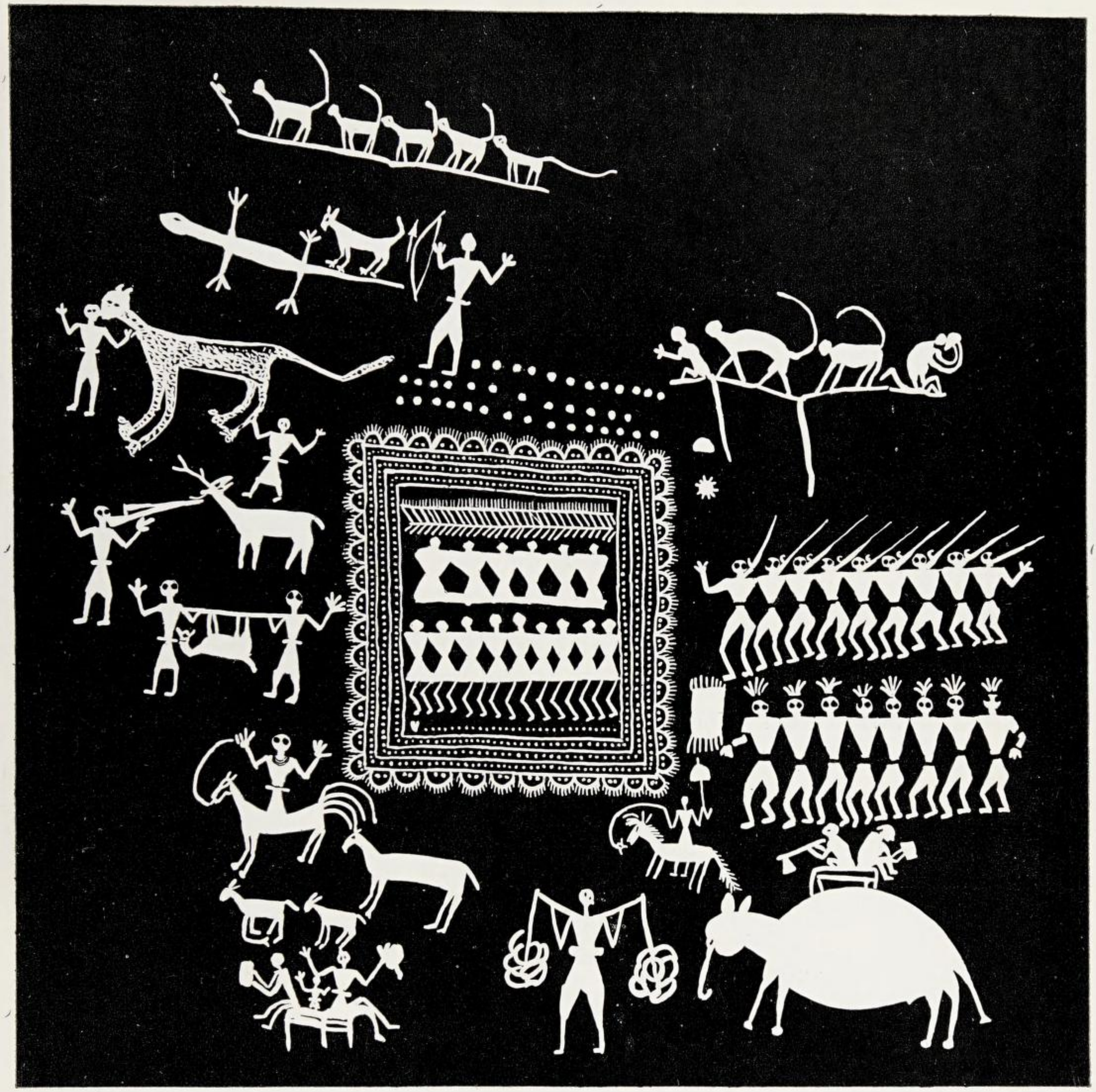


FIG. 219. *Saora drawing in honour of Jaliyasum. Kattumeru, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height,* 62 *inches.*

to suffer. When he should have been listening to the words of the gods all he could hear were the wrangling voices of jealous and possessive women. He consulted one of his colleagues who told him, 'You first married one spirit and then a second, so naturally the first is angry. You must make these two wives friends with each other.' Accordingly Dalimo made two sets of pictures, but the wives were not satisfied. At last he drew one big picture of the palace in the Under World where the two of them lived together. They were pleased with this and Dalimo was able to conduct his priestly business as before.

This fantastic story is entirely normal in the Saora setting, and the elaborate detail of the picture is almost as real as life in the everyday world. The manner of the drawing is a development of the simpler styles. Conventional symbols have established themselves and they are widely used in this area and are immediately understood. The human figure is here based on a single, or a double, triangle. A pregnant woman bulges to the right. A dead man is turned on his side. A house is indicated by rows of hatching, and the usual medley of chaprasis, animal pets and distinguished visitors shows how important everything is. The sun is represented by three concentric circles round a central blob; the moon looks like a banana enclosed within an encircling line. In this picture there are two points of special interest. At the bottom two women are grinding grain—a domestic touch that is rather uncommon; at the top, immediately below the sun, is a symbolized representation of sexual intercourse, a motif which recurs in Figs. 224 and 225; it is probably included to promote fertility.

Fig. 222 also illustrates the relations between a shaman and his spirit-wife. Durpan, a shaman of Potta village, was visited by his spirit-wife in a dream. 'You have married me,' she said. 'I am your woman and you are my man. But what about my relatives? Make

FIG. 220. *Saora picture from the house of Dalimo, the shaman of Karubai, Koraput District, Orissa. Height, 57 inches.*

them a house on the wall of your house, and then none of the demigods will be able to trouble you or your children.' That night she showed him what sort of picture he was to make, and the next day he fasted and drew it.

It is an elaborate affair, a little less detailed than the Karubai drawing, but better ordered. There is some attempt at symmetry—a tree on either side of the house, and rows of dancers above and below it. But there is no attempt at mathematical symmetry: there are, for example, nineteen women in the upper row of dancers and seventeen in the lower; there are ten swords on one side, eight on the other; seven guns on the left, seven on the right. But at least there is an attempt at a roughly equivalent balance.

The picture shows Durpan's spirit-helper and her relatives, and with them Sumantisum, the god of Sumanti Hill. The people of the Under World can marry the people living on this mountain and the drawing shows such a marriage in progress; at the bottom men are carrying a litter followed by a marriage-party on horseback. There is an elephant also, from Sumanti Hill, and the bride's treasure is tied on its back. On either side of the picture is a banyan tree with honeycombs hanging from the branches, and monkeys coming to steal the honey and squirrels climbing. There are peacocks, always associated with the Saora Dead, and what was described as the bear which acts as a priest in the Under World. To show the importance of the spirit-helper's family, there are sahibs among the guests; they sit on chairs outside the house; one smokes, another reads a book. Servants bring umbrellas; snakes and birds are the family pets.

Near the main drawing was a rather miscellaneous collection of images illustrated in Fig. 224. This includes a peacock, deer, something that looks like a giraffe, a potter with his pots, an archer shooting an arrow into the sky, a sword, a comb, a tortoise, the sun and moon. A tiger is eating a man, and on an elaborate bed is another

FIG. 221. *Saora representation of a human figure riding a bicycle. From the house of Sako Buyya, Gudang, Ganjam District, Orissa. Half actual size.*

representation of sexual intercourse; in this case, I was told, the parties were the god Sumantisum and his wife.

This motif recurs in Fig. 225, though here the act is differently portrayed, the couple being so intimately united that they have only one body between them. When two bodies, I was told, melt into each other in this way, conception inevitably ensues.

Fig. 225 comes from Boraisingi and is a beautifully executed piece of work. It tells a vivid story of the Under World. Gamru, who drew the picture, is a shaman and his paternal grandfather, Somra, was of the same profession. Somra had a daughter from his spirit-wife who was named Daruni and who had a romantic history. After Somra died and his ghost went to Kinorai, he took Daruni to live with him. One night he came in a dream to his grandson Gamru and said, 'We have no one to feed us and this girl Daruni badly needs a husband of the right type. You must marry her. Many Mannesums [this is the word used here for spirit-helper] have come to marry her, but she won't have any of them.' And Somra took Gamru's soul out of his body and took it to Kinorai and showed it everything. When Gamru awoke he made this *ittal* to protect himself against any possible danger that might arise from his daring journey and also for the honour of Daruni whom he now 'married'.

FIG. 222. *Saora picture illustrating the relations between a shaman and his spirit-wife. Potta, Koraput District, Orissa. Height, 39 inches.*

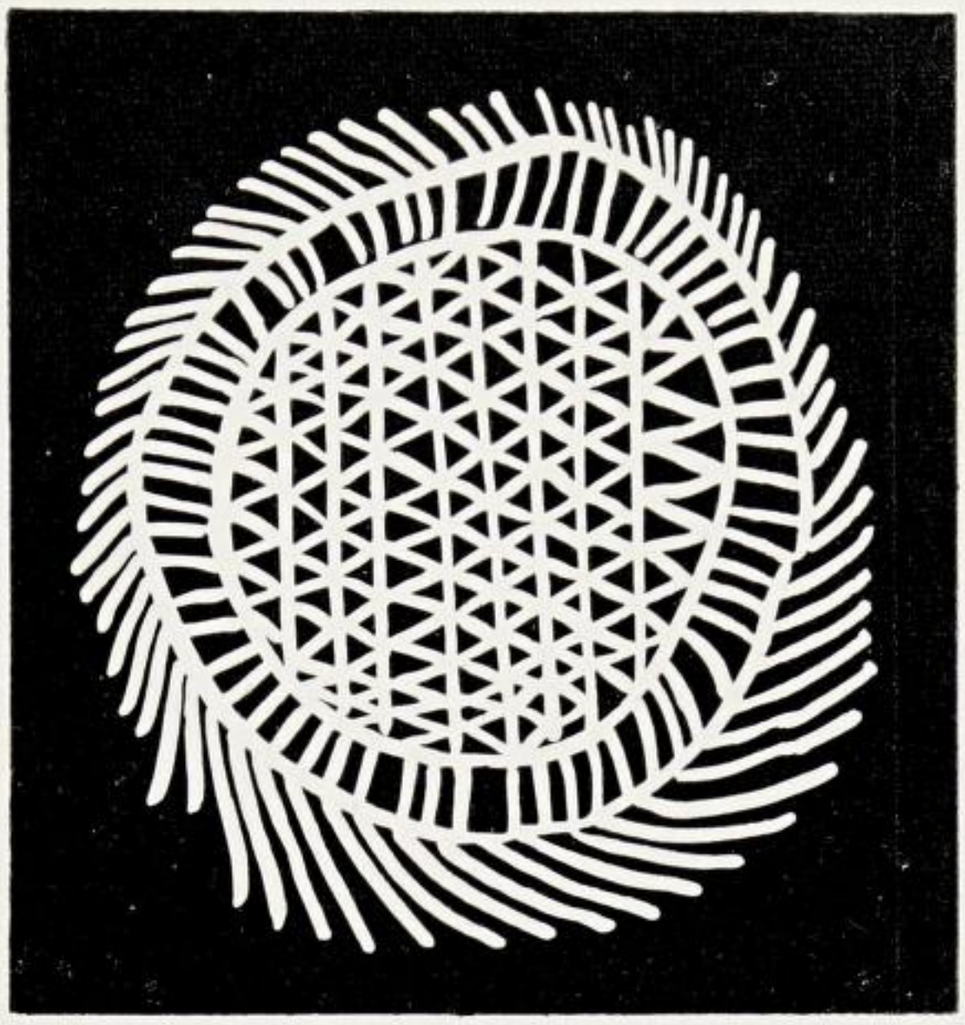


FIG. 223. *Saora symbol of the sun, under the name of Yuyungboi. Width, 27 inches.*

The picture is said to be an exact reproduction of Gamru's dream. In the centre is the great *sadru*-shrine in which the Mannesums have their home. At the top are a peacock and a snake to guard it. To the right is a banyan tree with a *sadru* built in the branches, and the usual monkeys stealing honey. On the roof of the shrine a cock and hen are copulating, while another cock comes to contest the union. This probably symbolizes the rivalry of Gamru and the Mannesums for Daruni's affections. In this shrine Daruni herself is shown hiding from the Mannesums who have come with gifts of liquor to betroth her; two men are searching for her at the foot of the tree. Some of her chaprasis, however, shoot at them with their guns. At the bottom of the picture are two porcupines; these animals act as the shamans of the Mannesums, and they are now being consulted by two visitors who have come to ask whether Daruni will be agreeable to a proposal of marriage. Nearby Somra himself divines with a winnowing-fan. Next to him, in the centre of the picture, is a horse on which one of the Mannesums is riding, and above are still other suitors for the elusive but obviously attractive young woman. On an elephant are the two spirit-children who were born to Gamru and Daruni after their 'marriage'. Strict chronological consistency was evidently not necessary

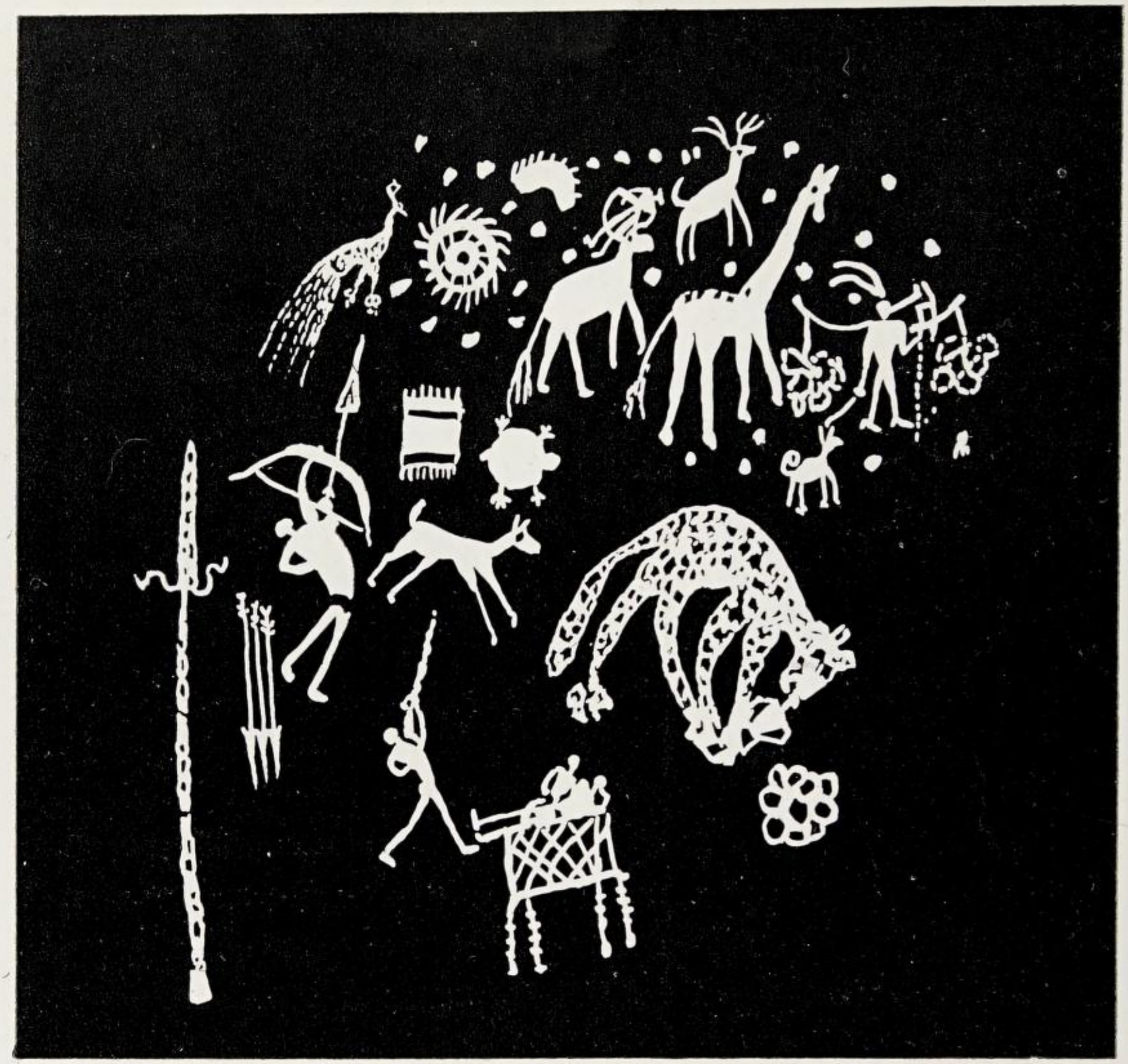


FIG. 224. *Group of figures painted near those shown in* FIG. 222.
Height, 36 *inches.*

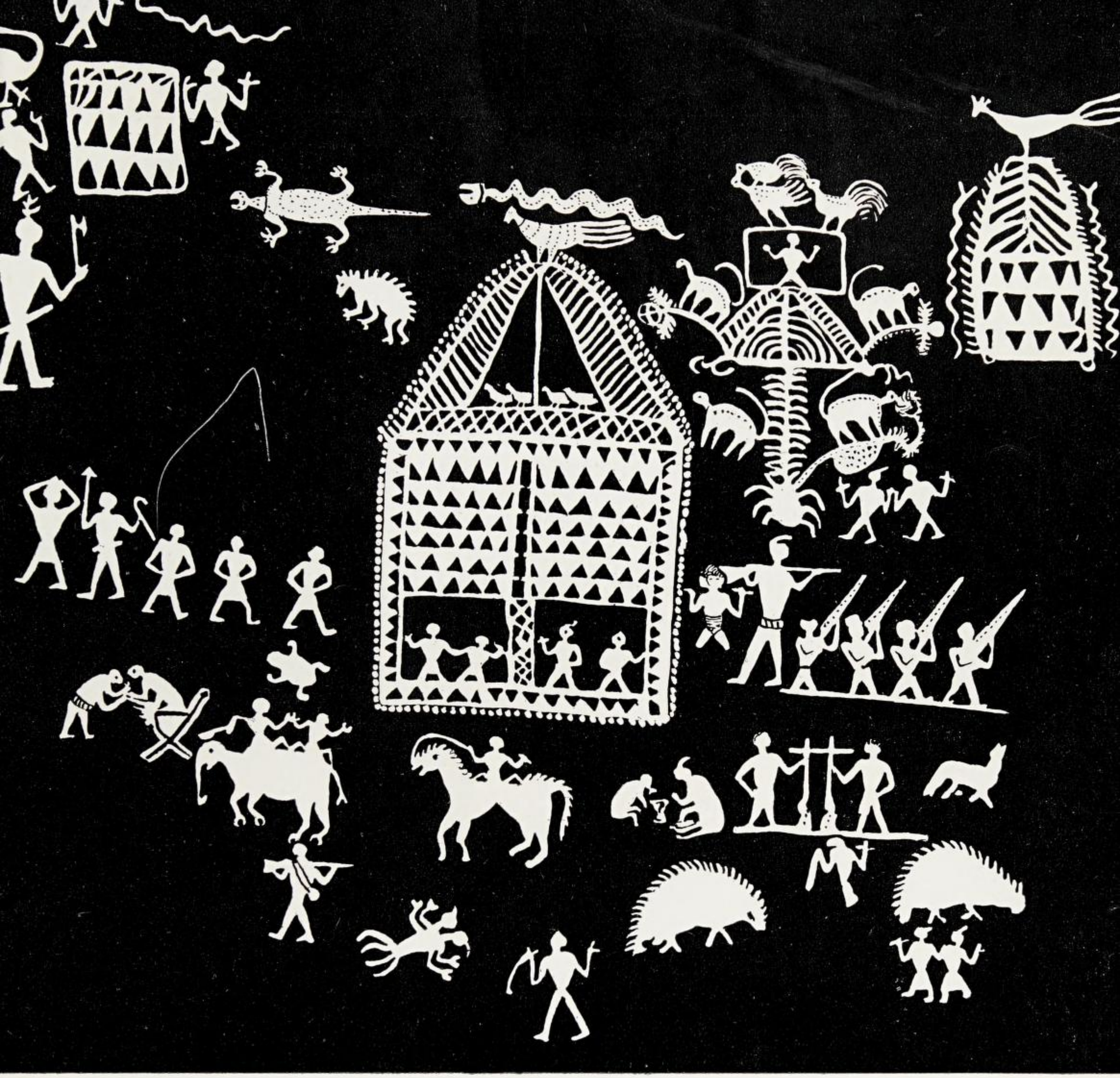


FIG. 225. *Saora picture from the house of Gamru, Boraisingi, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height, 42 inches.*

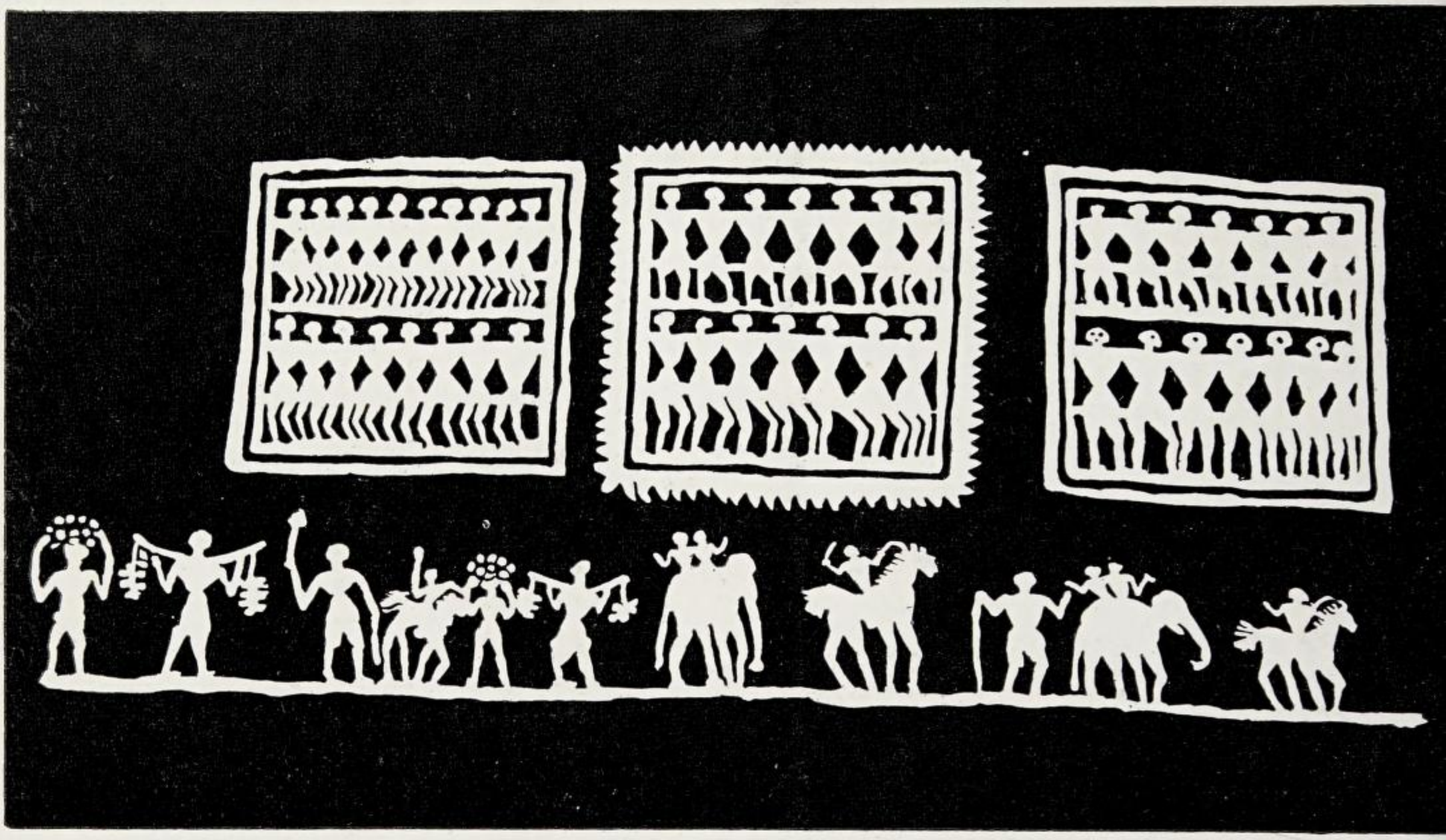


FIG. 226. *Saora picture to avert disease, from the house of Sartino at Angda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Length, 58 inches.*

in an *ittal* which was intended to flatter Daruni by showing how attractive she was before marriage and how fertile she was after it.

This brief account of the motives and methods of the Saora pictographs reveals how intimately to the tribal mind art and religion are connected. Indeed, among the Hill Saoras there is no art that is not inspired and directed by religion. As we see elsewhere in this book, they carve wooden images of gods and demons; they fashion peacocks to adorn their shrines; they decorate musical instruments used in divination. But they have no secular art of decoration. They are unusually deficient in the practice of bodily adornment; they can, it is true, 'dress up', but only on festal occasions. In the pictographs illustrated here, we see in a remarkably vivid manner how cult and myth can move a people to some sort of artistic expression; here are the records of their dreams, their eschatological hopes and fears, the

FIG. 227. *Elaborate pictograph showing the train and motor-car by which the ghost travels in the unseen world. Width, 65 inches.*

dramatization of their theological beliefs. And these things are set out in a style which, however crude it may seem to the sophisticated eye, is to them a triumph of technical achievement, a support to tribal morale, a cause of pride and self-respect.

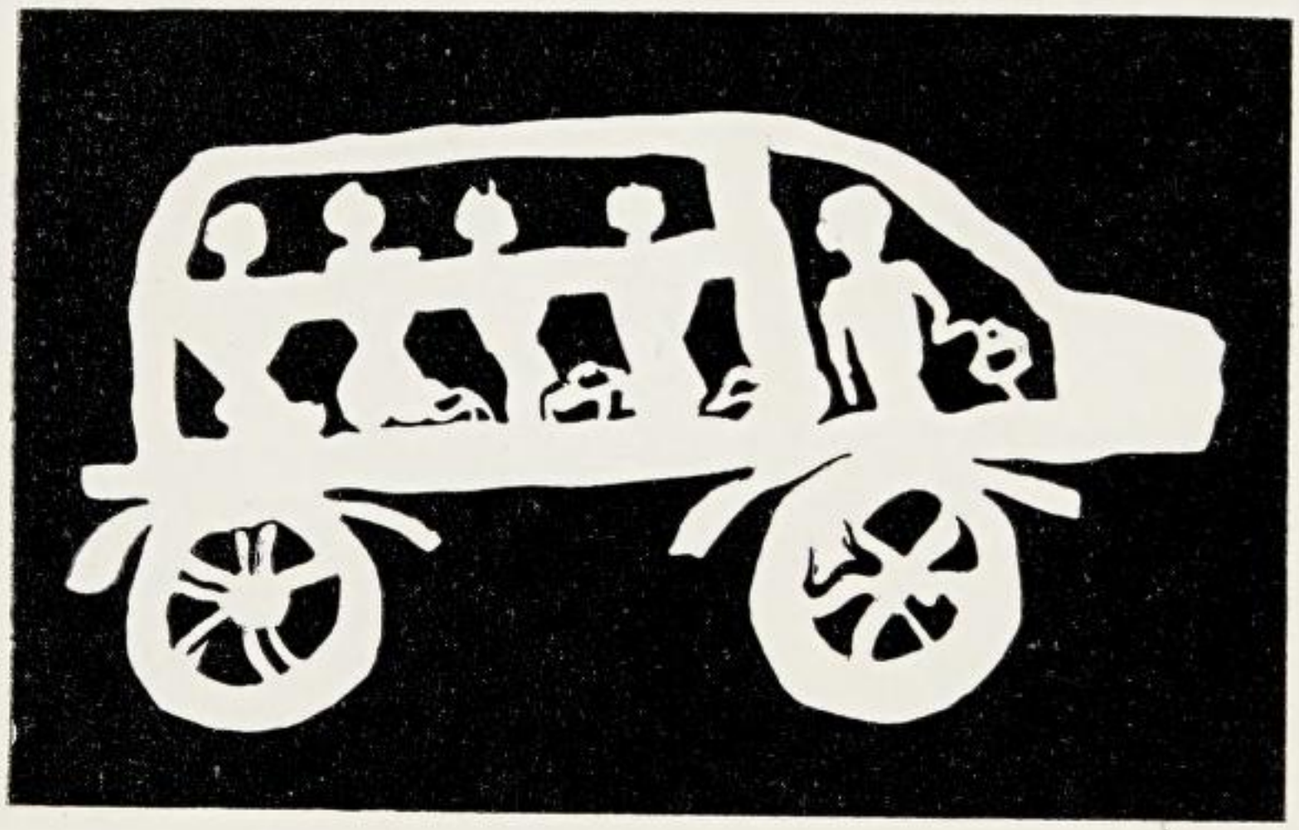


FIG. 228. *Saora drawing of a motor-car. From the house of Lakkia at Angda, Ganjam District, Orissa. Half actual size.*

FIG. 229. *Saora picture from Maneba, Ganjam District, Orissa. Height,* 33 *inches.*